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THE
DANGERS AND SAFEGUARDS
OF
MODERN THEOLOGY.

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OF
MODERN THEOLOGY.

CONTAINING

‘SUGGESTIONS OFFERED TO THE THEOLOGICAL STUDENT UNDER
PRESENT DIFFICULTIES’ (A REVISED EDITION),
AND OTHER DISCOURSES.

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TO
THE MASTER AND FELLOWS
OF
BALLIOL COLLEGE,

IN REMEMBRANCE
OF MUCH KINDNESS RECEIVED, AND MANY YEARS OF PLEASANT
INTERCOURSE,

This Volume is Inscribed

BY
THEIR FAITHFUL FRIEND AND FORMER FELLOW,

A. C. LONDON.

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INTRODUCTION.

THE first part of this book is a reprint of what was published fifteen years ago. The world has seen many changes since then ; but the Church of England has gone on very steadily in the course which those who carefully observed the current of opinion had then predicted. It may seem unlikely in these changing days that what was written for 1846 can be suitable for 1861. Most men change or greatly modify their opinions and sentiments in fifteen years. The rude test of experiment is continually making shipwreck of many skilfully-constructed theories ; and even he whose views of religion and society are from the bent of his mind most practical, continually finds, as life goes on, that there is something unreal in his opinions which requires, if not to be given up, at least to be carefully revised and altered. The trials of life greatly affect our mental vision : rightly used, they make us more sympathising, more considerate, more tolerant ; but they also more deeply convince us of the priceless value of truths which have been our soul's only stay in terrible emergencies. Few mortals pass any great length of time without sickness and sorrow ; and if a man has looked death in the face, or, while well in his own bodily health, has been stunned in mind by seeing fond hopes vanish, he will naturally cling with a firmer tenacity to the great religious truths which bore him up when all else failed, and will be

more jealous of any attempts to tamper with these truths than he was when he defended them in earlier life on grounds of mere speculative orthodoxy, having not yet learned to prize and love them through—what must be to each practically the surest test—their tried value to his own spirit. Thus our very passage through life imperceptibly modifies our views of religious truth. Moreover, we have not only our own experience, but what we see of the experience of others to influence us. The many changes also which time brings in our position and responsibilities—the enlargement of our knowledge or of the sphere of observation within which we are to form our judgment of the influences of religious truth—all these, imperceptibly it may be, but surely, affect our convictions.

It would not, therefore, have been surprising if the author of the following Discourses had found in 1861 that he could neither himself altogether endorse what he had written fifteen years ago, nor, if it did still retain its hold on his convictions, look upon it as applicable to the circumstances of a greatly-changed age. He has not, however, met with this difficulty. Reperusing what he then put forth, he finds it to be as true an exponent as ever of his real sentiments; and he thinks that, by God's blessing, the statements he long ago deliberately published may tend to quiet men's hearts even now. Hearing of new disputes and new fears, he feels that he has reason to thank God that his own mind, after some serious consideration, was settled on the points at issue now many years ago; and he humbly trusts he may do some service to others to whom those questions are new with which it so chances that he has been long familiar.

Several of the matters insisted on in the following volume

have a peculiar interest at this time. Men need to be told now, as much as they ever did, that controversy, to be Christian, must be conducted in a Christian spirit of forbearing love; and that intolerant judgments of those who differ from us, even on the most vital points, will only confirm our opponents in their error, while they are greatly injurious to our own hearts and very little likely to build up either ourselves, or those who are as yet undecided, in a faithful conviction of the real truth. Men need to be told now, as much as ever, that the truths of a living Christian faith cannot be made to find their way into reluctant minds through mere protest and negation, far less by the mere attempt to inflict pains and penalties on those who are in error. To warn us against what is not true is very different from giving us the truth. The Holy Spirit of God can indeed alone mould the convictions, but the human advocate of truth will not do his part in upholding it, unless he tries to clothe it in the living form of an embodied and intelligible teaching, capable of warming the sympathies and attracting the affections, at the same time that it appeals, as the case may be, either to the understanding or the highest reason.

Again, men still need to be reminded that one of the most marked features of the Church of England is its comprehensive spirit. It upholds, indeed, the great Gospel doctrines in their simple majesty, and clings to them as for life, but it is tolerant of very great liberty of opinion in the mode in which these doctrines are viewed or studied. It is this which fits it to be a National Church, and prevents it from being a sect. Our Church makes room within its system for the simplest expression of uninstructed pious sentiment, as well as for the acute speculations of a refined

or even subtle intellect. Embracing in its formularies at once the old simple outpourings of primitive or mediæval faith, and strictly defined statements on the controversies of the Reformation, while it brings everything to the test of that Scripture which God caused to be written that it might instruct men of all countries, all ages, and all shades of character, the Church of England is thus Catholic in the best sense. It holds forth to the world a Christianity which is neither all feeling, or imagination, or taste, nor all doctrine systematised by the intellect, nor all moral precept, nor even all earnest faith and love, but which is all these united—each subordinated to the great purpose which God has assigned it—the inferior elements employed as the hand-maids of the higher, that they may all work together for the regeneration of the world into the highest condition of humanity, after the likeness of the Lord Jesus Christ. To unite a wise and charitable view of our Church's doctrines with a zealous appreciation of that distinctive heavenly truth which is the sacred deposit it has received from the Apostles—this is the great problem for an inquisitive yet religious age.

Again, when men turn their thoughts from our own Church and its teaching to that by which we are encouraged and bound to test it—the Scriptures of truth—they require now-a-days, even more than ever before, to have some obvious principles reiterated in their ears. They acknowledge the Bible to be "Scripture." They must be warned to reflect seriously what is the full meaning of this term. Speculations of criticism, which cannot be stifled, even if we were justified in wishing that they might, are leading students to think much at this time of the human element in the

Bible; we are bound to call upon them to reflect seriously on the full force of that higher element which is divine.

Whether it be the critical study of Scripture, the history of its various books, and the exact construction and meaning of its statements, that occupies the student; or whether he is tracing the system of religious and moral teaching which is to be his chart in the journey of life, and tells us that he holds himself bound to test its accuracy, not by its accordance with Scripture only, but by Scripture, itself tested and weighed in the balance of what he calls the highest philosophy—there is much need for our begging him never to forget some fundamental truths. If he overlooks these, he will wander, and is sure to bewilder, in an inextricable maze, both himself and those who trust to him.

It may be well to note here, what some of the primary truths are, which a theological student cannot lose sight of without ruin. I. First, Scripture is the Word of God. A man may claim for divines the right to give different definitions of the term inspiration: he may raise questions as to whether there be such a thing as verbal inspiration, or whether the sacred writers, left free to choose their own language, were merely under a general control from above, which enabled them to speak with authority, as setting forth divine lessons and announcing the divine will: he may insist on prying (it may be with an unwisely curious spirit) into the exact mode and degree of these writers' illumination, asking how far their own characters, and the circumstances of their age, modified both their conceptions of divine truth and the form in which they taught it. A man may inquire how far God's revelation of Himself has been progressive, or how far He has given to His people both higher views of morality and a truer

insight into the relations of the soul to its Creator and Redeemer, as the world grew nearer to its promised deliverance through the full establishment of the Redeemer's kingdom, so that even the divine teaching of an earlier age seems comparatively poor when viewed side by side with that fuller light of which it was but the clouded dawn. A man may examine, if he will, into the important and very difficult question, What is the relation between spiritual truth (the essential subject-matter of the Bible) and those other departments of knowledge, not spiritual, with which it must be mixed up in the process of its transmission, as physical science, ethnology, history, and the like—he may ask how far we had any ground to expect that the writers of inspired books would be guided supernaturally to an acquaintance with those inferior truths which have nothing to do with the saving of men's souls, and on which God usually allows all men to inform themselves by the exercise of their natural faculties and the helps of common learning. It is granted that all these are matters important in their way, on which theologians have always speculated, and have, without any injury to their faith, arrived at very varying conclusions. We shall do great wrong to the cause of truth if we proclaim ourselves afraid to have these questions ventilated. We may not wish to raise them ourselves: we may from the very first, by a sort of natural instinct, feel—what probably the wisest men who have most fully and calmly weighed them have come to be convinced of as the conclusion of their study—that such questions, interesting as they seem, are scarcely capable of any accurate solution, and that those who give much time to them usually find themselves neither wiser nor better for all the trouble which they have

taken to solve them. But by all means let us be on our guard against expressions of unreasonable alarm, as if we were conscious of some formidable difficulties which we dare not face, and objected to any examination which came near the foundations of our faith, for fear that free inquiry might shake it to the ground. If men really feel a call to do so, let them sift the questions connected with the nature and limits of inspiration as they please; but what is demanded is this—let them remember, when they use the word Scripture, that it is synonymous with that other phrase, the Word of God. Of course, if a man hang so lightly to the faith of the Lord Jesus and the Apostles that he looks on the Bible as on Homer or Herodotus, the whole aspect of our controversy with him is changed; he cannot then be supposed to be arguing within the Church of England, nor within the limits of the Christianity of the Apostles or of Christ; we must arrange our argument on quite different grounds: but if he allows that there is such a thing as what the Lord and his Apostles called Scripture, and that the Old and New Testaments are that Scripture, then we ask him to remember that Scripture is the Word of God.

Now if we wish to know the Christian view of Scripture, we shall refer to what the Lord Jesus and the Apostles thought and said of the Old Testament. Certainly no lower view of the united Old Testament and New can satisfy us, than that which the Lord and His Apostles put forth respecting the Old. To judge what this view was, it may suffice to take only a few out of many examples. Consider the common texts, “Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures”* — “Search the Scriptures; . . . they are they which

* Matthew xxii. 29.

testify of me”*—“Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures.”† The Beræans were “more noble,” in that they “received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so.”‡ Apollos was “an eloquent man, mighty in the Scriptures;” and he “mightily convinced the Jews, shewing by the Scriptures that Jesus was Christ.”§ “Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.”|| “From a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation, through faith, which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is (or ‘all Scripture being given by inspiration of God,’ or ‘all inspired Scripture is also’) profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.”¶

What then, with these passages before us, shall we decide that the word Scripture meant to the Lord Jesus and His Apostles when they applied it to the Old Testament? Scripture was that, to the ignorance of which the Lord traces the religious errors of His Jewish countrymen—that, to open His disciples’ understanding of which He lingered upon earth after His resurrection—that, on the testimony of which He grounded the proof of His divine mission—that, the careful study of which ennobled the Christian character—that, a knowledge of which made an eloquent preacher powerful to convince and win men to Christ—that which, by its comforting influence, gives

* John v. 39.

† Luke xxiv. 45.

‡ Acts xvii. 11.

§ Acts xviii. 24, 28.

|| Romans xv. 4.

¶ 2 Timothy iii. 15, 16, 17.

the soul sure ground of hope—that which, having been the source and substance of Timothy's training from his childhood, is pronounced to be able to make him wise unto salvation, and keep him safe in dangerous days,* with their many trials—that, with his increasing knowledge of which the man of God will find an increase in his aptitude for his heavenly work, growing more perfect the more his insight into Holy Scripture grows. Let a man consider all the expressions thus quoted, and what they tell us, and say whether those who used them—the Evangelists, the Apostles, the Lord himself—thought of the Old Testament as anything lower than we estimate it. These expressions must mean that in some sense, being quite apart from all other books, and transcendently above them, it is the Word of God. The book thus spoken of is our own recognised volume of the Old Testament; and who shall say that, as the Apostles died, and men stored up the written record of what they had taught, and placed it side by side with the history of what both they and their Lord had said, and added it on to the existing volume of the Old Testament, this teaching was worthy of less respect, or any lower title, than that which belonged of right to the books composed by the prophets, seers, and historians of the elder times? Christ had left the earth; the Apostles were dead; though dead, they were still to speak. God intended their history and writings to be for His Church the guide of life, the test of doctrine. The new Scripture, like the old, was His Word—the Word of God.

It is only natural, then, that our own Church should lay such stress on a reverent study of the Holy Scriptures; that, while it avoids any over-accurate definition as to what inspi-

* 2 Timothy iii. 1.

ration is, or what are its exact limits, it should assign to the sacred books a place which unmistakably marks them as God's Word. Read the passages in the Ordination Service:—

“Do you unfeignedly believe all the canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testament?

“Will you diligently read the same unto the people assembled in the church where you shall be appointed to serve? *

“Are you persuaded that the Holy Scriptures contain sufficiently all doctrine required of necessity for Eternal Salvation through faith in Jesus Christ; and are you determined out of the said Scriptures to instruct the people committed to your charge, and teach nothing as required of necessity to eternal salvation, but that which you shall be persuaded may be concluded and proved by the Scripture?

“Will you be diligent in prayers, and in reading of the Holy Scriptures, and in such studies as help to the knowledge of the same, laying aside the study of the world and the flesh?

“We have good hope that you will continually pray to God the Father, by the mediation of our only Saviour Jesus Christ, for the heavenly assistance of the Holy Ghost, that, by daily reading and weighing of the Scriptures, ye may wax richer and stronger in your ministry.” †

This, then, is the first great truth with which the theological student, if he is wise, will never part—that the volume which is the basis of all his study is, in a real sense, the word of God. The feeling of this will greatly affect his mode of studying it. He will speak of it reverently: he will engage in the study in a spirit of prayer, as desiring, through this

* Ordering of Deacons.

† Ordering of Priests.

written record of God's dealings and teachings, to hold intercourse with God Himself. He will not indeed, and may not, if called by duty, hesitate to sift the evidence on which each particular portion of this volume rests its claim to hold a place in the august society in which he finds it; but, knowing the difficulty as well as delicacy of these inquiries, he will never speak or write in such a manner as may shock the honest piety of the unlearned, and do serious injury to his own soul, by accustoming him to think lightly, or dogmatise with the easy assurance of superior enlightenment, on matters respecting which the best and wisest of men are the most cautious. To demand this is not to stop free inquiry; nay, it is the only way effectually to further it: for free inquiry on such topics can never be conducted satisfactorily or well, except in a very reverent and cautious spirit.

II. Secondly. Other truths follow naturally from this first fully understood. If the Bible be God's word, and tell us all we can learn of Him, except through the natural conscience and reason, it has a very peculiar office. The collected experience of God's Saints in the uninspired ages of His Church is indeed most valuable as a help to us who are feeling our way to heaven with only the same measure of light which they had; and the rules which they laid down for their own and their fellow Christians' guidance are entitled to our serious attention. But God's Saints of the uninspired ages of the Church have always had Holy Scripture as the foundation and test of their belief and practice. Even when men have striven to exalt some fancied rival of human tradition or Church authority to an equality with Holy Scripture, they have been forced to confess the supremacy of Scripture, and have paid an unconscious reverence to it even

by the very ingenuity with which they have tried to force its meaning into accordance with their own traditions. We may say then that Scripture, being the word of God, has sometimes directly, sometimes almost unconsciously, but still really, been recognised by the Church in all ages throughout all Christendom as the guide of life for the many millions of men who have lived and died within the reach of Christian influences. This office Scripture holds not as the rival, but as the instructor and assistant, of the conscience and the reason. God's other lights are not extinguished, but made to burn all the brighter, and give the truer guidance to man, when quickened by the Word. The written word is like the stream of pure oxygen causing the dim natural light on which it is poured to burn up with a brightness and clearness which seems almost supernatural. The office, then, of the Word of God is to make the conscience an enlightened Christian conscience—the reason an enlightened Christian reason. And this account of its office suggests what we are to expect in its teaching: great principles as to God's nature and our own—as to what God has done and is ready to do for us—as to our weakness and its cure—as to the nature of sin in its relation to a holy God, and the mode in which man is freed from its thralldom and its punishment—as to the end and object and safeguards of our mortal life, and the grounds of our hope in death and for eternity: these are the subjects on which the Word of God must throw light, if it is to fulfil its high office. It is by what God's Word records on these subjects that the Reason will become capable of thought and judgment higher than nature gave it, and the conscience will grow in its power of approving and commending to the heart a standard of living such as uninstructed nature never

dreamed of, and which is perpetually growing purer and higher, as Christian principles are more fully supplied from God's Word, and more reverently received and dwelt on.

But if this be a true account of the office of the Word of God, obviously its teaching is to be looked for in the great principles which pervade it. Not in obscure texts of doubtful application—not in the minor details of its history—not in the imagery with which God has willed to clothe its heavenly lessons, and adapted them to arrest the fancy or imagination of uninstructed or of refined man—not certainly in its adherence to the opinions on physical science which prevailed in the age when it was written, and according to which God allowed it to be moulded, because He never meant to open a short road to the knowledge of common scientific truth through the miracle of revelation—not in these do we look for its teaching—it is not to these that the faithful Christian clings, rejoiced to recognise in Holy Scripture the accents of the voice of God speaking directly to the conscience and the reason. All the subordinate elements, indeed, in the Sacred books, which, by God's appointment, play a secondary part, each according to its measure and degree, in conveying to men's souls the great truths revealed by the Divine Will, have rightly gained a certain sanctity since God has thus employed them to further His great purpose. Still nothing but confusion can arise from identifying these inferior instruments with the great truths of which they are the vehicle.

Further these great truths are few, simple, easily to be traced, shining with the brightness of the light of God, not in the New Testament only, but all through the Bible, for those who, like us, are privileged to view it as one whole book, perfected and illustrated in its close by the teach-

ing of the Lord Jesus and his Apostles. It could not be otherwise with a book which God intended to be the constant teacher and enlightener of the whole human race. Those may allow Scripture to be obscure, and may conceive that the truths, which it reveals as necessary for salvation, form a very complicated scheme, who deem that its right interpretation requires the constant superintendence of an infallible Church : but we Protestants, who believe that through it God in Christ speaks with power to each individual soul, will be prepared to find its statements simple, and its doctrines few. It is a favourite device of Rome to represent Scripture as obscure. Granted that there are points in it on which men not only will, but fairly may, hold diverse opinions to the end of time. But these points very indirectly, if at all, concern the soul's salvation. The Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ is set forth in its fulness in every book, we might almost say in every chapter, of the New Testament. The Old Testament, lighted up by the brightness of an interpretation reflected from the New, is found instinct with the same spirit of life struggling to make itself understood in ages over which darkness still brooded. The most touching and powerful truths of the Gospel are sometimes wrapped up in a single phrase or name : Christ—Emanuel—Jesus—the Saints—the Elect—the Brethren—the Lamb of God—the Marriage-Supper of the Lamb—the Bride—the New Jerusalem—how powerfully does the mere repetition of these names preach the Gospel to the faithful heart ! while the account of the institution of the two Sacraments has embodied as it were in visible form the whole Christian scheme ; beginning with the necessity of a new birth, and pointing to the redeemed soul's final and complete union with Christ through the efficacy of His atoning sacrifice.

Away, then, with the thought that the Bible is obscure. As the instructor of our poor humanity it speaks direct from God in accents intelligible to all; and it can at once reach all hearts and quicken all intellects, when the Holy Spirit removes the clouds of worldliness and sin, which chill the sympathies and darken the mental vision. This, then, is the second great truth to which the theological student ought to cling. It is of the very idea of the Bible as the Word of God addressed to ignorant and sinful men, that it must speak in accents few, and loud, and clear. It would have been no boon to give us a so-called guide of life which was obscure as the dark oracles of heathenism. It has few words to speak, and these go straight to the heart. Its many books are all taken up in illustrating and enforcing these same truths in many aspects.

And here we call to mind what a wonderful cumulative force this view gives to the evidence of Christianity. Our conviction of the great verities rests on a solid foundation entrenched in each separate book of the New Testament, nay, almost in each section of each book. If we had only one short Epistle left to us, it would preserve and preach the Gospel; nay, if the whole record of Christ and his Apostles were lost, we could recover the Gospel scheme, now that it has once been suggested to us, as the only legitimate interpretation of many parts of the Old Testament. The strength of our position may be illustrated by what we are told of those persecuted Christians of Madagascar, whom in our own day a brutal tyranny endeavoured to deprive of all access to the Word of God. They stored up texts here and there, written on scraps and secreted in their garments; and these, conned over by stealth, preached the Gospel to them and to their children, and became their guide of life, enabling them

not only to live but greatly to increase as a Christian community, in spite of all attempts to plunge them in spiritual darkness. Our faith is, as it were, guarded in an impregnable fortress, against which our adversaries can never prevail; for each few yards of ground is capable of being defended by itself, secure within its own strong walls, and independent of the cluster of the thousand other forts around it which are enclosed within the same outer bastions. What a feeling of strength does this give—how little cause is there to tremble lest we be driven from the ancient stronghold!

And, moreover, when a man has once mastered this thought, that our faith in the Christian verities is thus unassailable, how do minor difficulties of detail vanish before this great conviction! If we cannot but believe the Gospel of Jesus Christ in its grand features—so marked as they are with the supernatural and miraculous—where is the wisdom or logical consistency of standing hesitating while men scrupulously weigh the separate evidence for each fresh display of God's power in the Bible? If a man believes that the Eternal Son, in the person of Jesus Christ, lived and died on earth to save sinners, he is, by the very condition of his belief, in such an atmosphere of the supernatural, that it is vain to be wasting his time with questions as to the less or more of the strange signs which accompanied the Lord's coming, or from a distance heralded its approach. It seems childish to admit a scheme of religion which in its very essence is supernatural, and which implies a time when God worked miraculously, and yet to be bargaining as to how many of the miracles recorded in the Sacred Books we can afford to believe.

III. But, thirdly, besides these truths as to the office and character of Holy Scripture, the theological student, to be safe,

must understand his own nature. With the Bible open before us, well versed in its contents, agreeing in the main not only as to the principles of its interpretation, but even in the use of the very same words and phrases as expressive of the truths it reveals, we shall still be found to regard these truths in very different aspects—even to attach totally opposed ideas to the formulæ by which the Church has guarded them, according to our knowledge or ignorance of the wants of human hearts. It would not be wise to plunge here into the disputes lately revived on the doctrine of the Atonement; but let this be considered, that, if we form a high estimate of the unaided moral powers of man, and see not how sin has blighted them—if sin appears to us rather as an irregularity than as a pestilence, and we have no deep conviction of its loathsomeness and hatefulness in the sight of the All Holy—if we perceive no very great difference in point of moral value between the life of a heathen hero and a Christian saint, and express ourselves, therefore, in very different terms from St. Paul as to the perfection of the Christian character, being satisfied to hold up as the model a well-run course of usefulness and benevolence, which has given no sign of the spiritual life within—if we thus show practically, however we may theorise, that we are contented with what adorns this passing life, without attaching it by unseen chords to the world above and the life eternal—then, forming a very inadequate conception of the wants of the human soul, we are likely greatly to err also in interpreting what the Bible tells us of their remedy. If a man is convinced, in the depths of his own consciousness, and perceives manifested in the thousand forms of sin and misery around him, that, whatever marks of its godlike origin his nature

bears, it is greatly estranged from God—if he knows that sin, clinging close to him from his birth, and ever springing up afresh within him, even when it seems most completely vanquished, does in very truth build up some barrier, insurmountable by human strength, between his soul and God ; he will rejoice to welcome the simple truth, that the sacrifice of the death of Christ was offered to remove this barrier. He may not, perhaps, trouble himself with speculations as to whether this sacrifice was necessitated by God's justice or his love ; he may not be able to tell what great master of theology—Anselm or Aquinas, or Luther or Hooker—has best set forth in logical form the truth for which his heart yearns ; but he will welcome it as breathing all through the New Testament, ever sounding especially from the lips of that Apostle, the memory of whose early life made him feel and confess himself the chief of sinners, and therefore hopeless without Christ's sacrifice. He will find that, if he could only enter into that deep loathing with which penitent David looked back on the sin that had debased him, the doctrine of an atoning sacrifice would become a necessity in his theology. To the formalist a stumbling-block, and to the intellectualist foolishness, this doctrine, to him whose heart is deeply convinced of sin, becomes the truest manifestation both of the power of God and the wisdom of God. And round this doctrine of the Atonement cluster many other truths, giving the soul peace while it turns to God as a reconciled Father, and is gaining a new power to follow Him with the love of a child, and no longer with the half-service of a slave.

It will be obvious that this publication has been called forth by the 'Essays and Reviews' which have lately attracted

so much attention. It is not necessary to pronounce here whether the writers in that volume on the one hand, or any of those, on the other, who have very naturally been irritated by their statements, have, in the ardour of controversy, lost sight of any of the great principles without the guidance of which it has been here stated that real Christian truth is unattainable. Certainly in some passages of these 'Essays and Reviews' there is displayed somewhat of a reckless and almost flippant spirit. It would be unfair to regard the several authors as individually responsible for each other's opinions, in spite of the prefatory declaration that each is to be judged by his own article alone. "They are responsible for their respective articles only," and "have written in entire independence of each other, and without concert or comparison." It is to be hoped that the second sentence of the preface does not bind them to approve each of the other's general tone and spirit. The friends of each will certainly wish that, if they desired to maintain this "limited liability," they had not united in a partnership sure to be damaging to all its members. Each of them would, perhaps, have had enough to do to defend his own opinions: they have each more than enough, when called, as the public, incapable of nice distinctions, is sure to call them, each to defend the opinions and sentiments of all the seven. In fact, the union in such a league is as wrong as it is foolish. It is sure to be regarded as a league offensive and defensive; and therefore they have themselves to thank if the public insists on their bearing each other's burdens.

Moreover, as each of them suggests certain doubts and difficulties, the force of each of these difficulties is greatly increased by the others with which it is associated. If seven men unite

their force for any deed of bodily aggression, and the subject of their violence feels greatly aggrieved by their united blows. it will scarcely do for them each to plead that he is responsible for no more than he has himself inflicted. If he who is assailed suffers in his health or dies, a wise jury will certainly find that they are each and all of them responsible, collectively and severally, for the effects which they could not have produced singly, but which have followed from their united efforts. Therefore these seven authors are greatly to blame for having written one large, and not seven small books.

Each Essay might have been dealt with far more in accordance with the fair rules of controversy, if it had either stood alone, or been declared to be part of one whole divided into seven parts. As the volume stands, that sort of illustration, which the reader not unnaturally fancies that the statements of each author receive from his coadjutors, gives to much they say the appearance of insinuation, for each by comparison with the others seems to mean more than he himself says; and insinuation is the most unfair of all kinds of argument, as it is the most difficult to meet. Some of the authors, indeed, speak very plainly in the rashness of their statements; but these statements, though they have much shocked the religious mind of the country, are very little likely to do any real harm. They are capable of being met at once as inaccurate facts or exaggerated inferences. Divines who have leisure will soon be found to confute them; and meanwhile it would be forming a very low estimate of both the faith and the logical powers of the reading public, to suppose that these statements will be believed on the unsupported authority of their authors.

But whatever influence such statements have is really

derived from the more earnest tone and deeper reasoning of other parts of the volume. So that from this unfortunate partnership the good which is in the book goes to strengthen the evil, and the evil makes every one suspicious even of what is good. The authors probably expected that the volume would be judged like other volumes of Oxford and of Cambridge Essays, in which their names had of late years appeared, the several papers of which were not held to be even so much connected as they would have been had they been published in any of our established periodicals. If such was the expectation, it has been completely frustrated. The public, however unfairly, certainly not unnaturally, has insisted on regarding this book as one whole, and is irritated by the difficulty of knowing what is the real meaning, and what the force, of the system which it is called upon to confront. The writers are therefore bound in fairness to those who wish to answer them, as well as in justice to themselves, either to draw closer or stand more distinctly apart: let each state what his view of Christian truth is; and it would indeed be shame to us as a Church if divines were not found with leisure, learning, and ability, ready to examine their system, and refute whatever in it is found to be dangerous error.

Meanwhile the author of the present publication thinks it right to call attention to old truths which may be forgotten in the din of controversy, but cannot be disproved. Of two out of the seven Essayists it is impossible for him to speak without affectionate regard, connected as he is with them by a friendship of more than twenty years. He deeply regrets the tone of the alliance in which they are united: he feels confident that the deepening experience

of life, and a larger acquaintance both with the souls of men and that Word of God on which the soul hangs for its salvation, will modify, and, by the help of the Spirit of God, refine, and exalt, and spiritualise their own views of the relation in which fallen man and God stand each to the other. He prays them to be very discreet and cautious as to what they recommend to the souls over which they are sure to have influence. The Church of Christ and His truth will not suffer by free inquiry ; but no man has a right to remove the old landmarks of thought and religious feeling, without being prepared to point out others, which will enable us to see distinctly where the ground really consecrated by the presence of God lies. The Fathers of the Reformation were not destructives. They saw distinctly, and proclaimed and embraced with all their souls, the truth which was overlaid by the errors they resisted. It is quite another matter to engage in a warfare against old opinions, without putting forth any clear view of the eternal truth on which we wish the soul to rest. The Church will certainly hail with satisfaction any publication which shall set forth the positive Gospel truths forming the staple of the personal religion and practical teaching of these writers, and disclaim the errors which they appear to encourage. The object of this volume will be gained if, by God's help, it suggests to any a few thoughts which may keep their souls near to God, and to the truth of the Lord Jesus Christ, in an age when doubts are afloat on all sides, and many know not how to calm them.

London House, February, 1861.

SUGGESTIONS

OFFERED TO THE THEOLOGICAL STUDENT,
UNDER PRESENT DIFFICULTIES.

1846.

School-house, Rugby, 23rd April, 1846.

It is stated in one of the following Discourses, that there is a mixture of truth in every attractive error ; and that, therefore, none can successfully meet such error except those who understand, and are willing to appreciate, the truth which is mixed up with it. If a man would persuade others not to be Romanists, he must know what the truths are on which the strength of Romanism is built : if he would persuade them not to adopt what is commonly, vaguely enough, called Rationalism, he must have some acquaintance (the deeper the better) with the literature and habits of thought prevalent in that country to which the system owes its birth. This seems to be a mere truism. Yet so strange are the prejudices which sway even intelligent and good men, that a very general impression seems to prevail amongst English divines, that the very fact of a writer's showing any acquaintance with the theology of Germany may be taken as an *à priori* indication of unsoundness. There are of course very few who would have the boldness to confess that they entertain so unreasonable an opinion ; but they who act on this

opinion are certainly not few, and very serious evil may, before we are aware, be thus done to our Church: for certainly it is not impossible that young and ardent minds may be driven, almost against their will, to look with too much sympathy upon errors with which they find themselves unjustly charged.

It is scarcely more than might be expected from this prejudice if some English writers, who draw many good thoughts from the Protestant divines of the Continent, seem not unnaturally to have become unwilling to refer more than is absolutely necessary to the sources to which they are indebted.

The author of the present volume is deeply sensible of the very limited range of his own acquaintance with the divines who are thus looked upon with suspicion; but he has thought it a duty, in order to protest against this prejudice, as well as for other reasons, to refer distinctly to the few of whose assistance he has availed himself. For it is of much importance that English readers, if they do not know it already, should learn, that Germany has to boast of writers in almost every department of theology, who unite the deepest learning with a sound and earnest Christian faith; and that it is to such writers we shall mainly be indebted, if the Infidelity which is commonly associated with the name of their country be smitten and overthrown. It is indeed much to be deprecated that these writers should become directly the guides of the English mind. They have their German peculiarities; and their whole mode of treating subjects is affected by the controversies which are around them in their own land. What is wanted to meet Infidelity in this country is an English theology, which, fully alive to the peculiar excellences of

our great national Divines, shall thankfully avail itself of the labours of foreigners, while it is still, essentially, our own.

And now a very few words seem required to explain the connexion and bearing of the following Discourses. Shortly after the author was appointed to the office of Select Preacher, and before he had entered on his duties, it seemed probable to many well acquainted with the feelings prevalent in Oxford, that great changes would soon occur in the theological atmosphere of the place. Symptoms were not wanting to indicate that the opinions which had been for some years dominant were about to disappear almost as rapidly as they had sprung up; while nothing was so likely to give them for a time a lingering hold over the public mind, as those injudicious attempts which are often made to destroy error by mere protest, without any efforts to substitute a better system in its room. Subsequent events have certainly confirmed the impression that such a change was approaching, as the erroneous system alluded to did, by the publication of Mr. Newman's Essay on Development, receive its deathblow from the very hand to which it owed its creation.

The question then naturally occurred, what ought to be done to guide the minds of younger students amid that shaking of all opinions which was likely to follow? It seemed that the great object ought to be, to direct attention to some intelligible, enlightened, and well-grounded Protestant system, which might, by the blessing of God's Spirit, recal men's minds to the simplicity of the Gospel, and enable them to take their stand on the theology of the New Testament, amid the ruins of that baseless traditional teaching which was crumbling around them.

To effect this, however, must be the work of time, and is

the great duty of those to whom at this trying juncture the University entrusts the task of conducting its daily instructions, and moulding the minds of the young, through personal intercourse, both by precept and example.

Meanwhile it became obvious, that, as the transition-state is always one of great anxiety, there could be little doubt of the particular very alarming direction in which thoughtful minds would be not unlikely to hurry, in escaping from the system which they had learned to distrust. The teaching of the preceding ten years had completely unsettled men's minds; and it was certain that they could not quietly return to the old channels. A thousand new thoughts had been suggested to them. New fields of theological inquiry lay enticingly open on every side. It might, indeed, be hoped that such works as Trench's *Notes on the Parables* and the *Miracles*, uniting, as they do, an earnest zeal for faithful religion with an inquiring spirit acquainted with the wants and longings of an intellectual age, would tend to give a safe direction to the inquiries on which so many had entered. But no one could doubt that the prospect was full of danger; and that every man who thought he understood the temptations to which his younger brethren were exposed, was bound to use all his influence, if perchance he might benefit them.

The intention of these Discourses then was in connexion with the present tendency of men's minds, to offer some few suggestions which occurred only at spare moments in the midst of the claims of a laborious practical occupation, but which it was still hoped might possibly be of use in showing the spirit in which speculative error ought to be met. They may perchance lend some assistance, however slight, to the efforts of any leading spirits to be found amongst us who

unite an understanding of the present state of feeling in the rising generation of our divines with a real knowledge of that attractive theology which, coming from the early seat of the Reformation, seems likely, for good or for evil, so deeply to affect the highest interests of our own Church; and who sanctify their acuteness and learning by an earnest love of Gospel truth. Humanly speaking, it is only to such men, if perchance they may be found, that we can look with any confidence as fitted to be the guides of an inquiring age.

DISCOURSE I.*

ST. JOHN'S GOSPEL THE MODEL OF CONTROVERSY.

 ST. JOHN XX. 31.

“These are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through his name.”

THIS is St. John's own account of the object with which he composed his Gospel. It is doubtful whether we have distinct historical grounds for attributing to him any other motive. The well-known assertion of Irenæus,† that the Apostle was induced to write by his desire to oppose the errors of Cerinthus and the Nicolaitans, has been repeated by a chain of early authors, but with such slight variations in the name of the prevailing heresy, as seem to endanger the claims of this tradition to any great historical or chronological accuracy. It is well known that Clement of Alexandria, as quoted by Eusebius,‡ has asserted, that St. John wrote in order to fill up the deficiencies of the other Evangelists, by the publication of a more spiritual gospel. And Eusebius § has recorded his own opinion, that St. John, having this completion of the Gospel-history in view, effected his object chiefly by a detailed account of the events which happened between our Lord's birth and the imprisonment of the Baptist. This opinion of Eusebius

* This and the four following Discourses were delivered before the University of Oxford.

† I would refer to Lücke's Commentary (Bonn, 1840), ch. iii., in which is collected the testimony of antiquity on the facts here mentioned. Any reader of Lücke will see how largely throughout this sermon I have availed myself of his suggestions and references.

‡ Euseb. H. E. vi. 14.

§ Ibid. iii. 24.

is sanctioned by Jerome,* but not to the exclusion of the polemical object to which Irenæus points.

Now, it will be found on examination that probably, as has been well observed,† these several statements rest rather on an exegetical than on any historical or even traditionary basis. I mean that most, if not all of these writers (as is clearly the case with Eusebius), were not so much recording facts which history told them as to the object of St. John, but rather bringing forward conjectures, which they naturally formed for themselves from the study of his Gospel, and from their observation of the uses to which it was obviously capable of being applied.

It is not at all intended that these writers ought not to have formed such conjectures, or that there is any inconsistency between their statements and that of the Apostle himself in our text. When St. John says of his Gospel, that it was written that those to whom it was addressed might “believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing they might have life through His name,” he attributes to himself a motive which must equally have influenced the other three Evangelists; for all, in obedience to their Saviour’s last command, had devoted their lives to the salvation of their brethren. It was natural for the early readers of St. John’s Gospel, as it is for us, to seek some further explanation of its marked peculiarities. What we have now to note is, that apparently the earliest writers, whatever reference they may at first sight appear to make to certain outward traditions, did in reality in this matter seek rather for the solution of their difficulty in that intelligent examination of the book itself, illustrated by the known

* De Vir. Illust. 9.

† Lücke’s Comment. vol. i. p. 189.

history of the times, to which sound Biblical criticism has ever pointed as the best guide, when used humbly in dependence on the Spirit of God, for enabling us to understand His Word.

If we endeavour then ourselves, aided by the suggestions of those early writers, so to examine St. John's Gospel that it may as it were speak for itself and tell us of its object, we shall probably come to the conclusion that this object was threefold. First, It may be doubtful, as a matter of history, whether the Apostle wrote with any distinct especial reference to the particular heresy of Cerinthus; but heresies like that of Cerinthus he had undoubtedly to oppose. Secondly, He knew that the best way to oppose these heresies was by writing an account of our Lord's life, more distinctly spiritual than the histories of the three Evangelists who had gone before him. And, thirdly, As the new errors which had arisen had called for a new gospel, it followed, of course, that the points of view from which he was now to survey the history, and the discourses as well as incidents which he must of necessity introduce in illustration of these views, must make his work for the most part supplementary to the writings of his three predecessors.

This account of St. John's threefold object in the composition of his Gospel—uniting the three early opinions into one whole—has at least the merit of giving an obvious explanation of each of its marked peculiarities. I believe, also, that a patient examination of the whole book will confirm our supposition as to the gradation according to which the members of this threefold object ought to be ranked. The Apostle's main object then is, in the best sense of the word, polemical. His work, being polemical, naturally dwells on those spiritual

doctrines which are the true antagonists of the errors he confutes; and the form of a supplementary narrative of the Lord's life and teaching was wisely selected as the best vehicle for confuting erroneous doctrine, by its striking exhibition of positive truth in his heavenly words and deeds.

Taking, then, this to be the true account of the object of St. John's Gospel, I propose to examine how far the book may be rightly regarded as the Divine model, which the Holy Spirit has given to Christians to direct them in their struggles with erroneous teaching.

I. First of all let us note, that there was much in the circumstances of the beloved Apostle which pointed him out more than his fellow-disciples as the man best suited to be the champion of truth against these growing errors.

1. St. John must have been acknowledged, even by his opponents, to be more likely than any other Apostle to be well acquainted with the true doctrine of his Master.

It is not meant that there is any ground for drawing distinctions between the different degrees of heavenly illumination with which the Apostles were enlightened; but such distinctions were drawn by heretics at a very early time. To attempt to draw these distinctions is indeed the sure way to shake the foundations of our faith, by raising questions as to the degree of deference which we owe to each inspired authority; while both the writers of the New Testament themselves,* and, more distinctly, the wisest uninspired Christians in all ages, following their example, have regarded the book as one whole, the several parts of which God's providence did from time to time cause to be

* 2 Peter iii. 15, 16.

added to the already existing canon of the Old Testament, while the new works, as they were successively written, became invested with the same majesty of an unquestioned authority as belonged to the *γράφαι* of the elder time. To these elder scriptures our Lord had most distinctly given his heavenly sanction; and the new writers were even more clearly proved by miracles, than their predecessors of the Old Testament, to form one body, as the others had formed one chain, of inspired teachers accredited from Heaven. The very gulf by which Christ's overruling providence ordained that the body of these teachers should be separated from the holy uninspired men who came immediately after them, will show, that whatever writer is proved by historical evidence to belong to this Apostolical or canonical body, is to be regarded by Christians with implicit reverence as delivering the oracles of God. And when a man's mind is once satisfied with the historical proof that any writing is a genuine portion of this one book, he cannot, without danger, draw distinctions of greater or lesser authority between the several members of what God has united, that it may be, not in this or that portion of it, but as one whole, the perpetual record of His will.

But still, necessary as it is to maintain the equally inspired authority of all writers who are proved to be inspired at all, it is certain that, in early as in later times, this principle has been continually neglected. It was not in Corinth alone that men opposed the authority of Cephas to that of Paul; nor is it in our age alone that infidelity has endeavoured to justify itself by the watchword of "not Paul but Jesus." Doubtless there were many of the early heretics who considered that the pure philosophical Christianity, which the Lord Jesus came to promulgate, had been cor-

rupted by the ignorance or prejudice of his followers. But where could such men expect a true account of what the Lord had taught, if not from the Apostle who had been with him in his secret hours, and whom the Church delighted to honour with the name of his “bosom friend” (*ἐπιστήθιος*)? So that, speaking after the manner of human evidence, we recognise, in St. John’s intimate friendship with his Divine Master, the first requisite which he possessed above all other men to be the champion of God’s truth. Nor will it, I think, be fanciful to maintain that, even in this point, St. John is our model of controversy—that Gospel truth will best be maintained by him who has lived, if we may so speak, in the most intimate society of his now unseen but still present Saviour.

2. Again, the Apostle’s time of life seems to point him out very naturally as the fittest champion of truth. It is always an evil sign when the young and inexperienced put themselves forward as the leaders of Christ’s Church. Now, it is difficult to doubt that the Apostle wrote his Gospel, if not late in his long-extended life, at least after he had reached and passed maturity. It may be granted that his silence as to the destruction of Jerusalem seems to forbid us to place the date of his Gospel after that event; for it is scarcely possible that, if the ruin of the old system by the fulfilment of his Lord’s prophecies had already come, he could have failed to allude to it. But the testimony of antiquity as to the country in which he composed his work equally forbids us to place the date much earlier. We have the strongest negative evidence from St. Paul’s writings, that, so long as he lived, St. John had not yet made the Asiatic province the seat of his labours. Now, St. John could not well have been more than ten years younger than our Lord; and if he wrote his Gospel after

St. Paul's death, and near the time of the destruction of Jerusalem, he must have been fast approaching to his sixtieth year. Mature in age as well as holiness, he seemed called both by his apostolic office and his time of life to stand forth and save the younger members of his Master's flock from the grievous errors that destroyed so many of them.

These, however, are only outward circumstances in the Apostle's history. It is better to note, in the second place, how his own peculiar character fitted him for this warfare.

II. First, St. John was, above all his brethren, the Apostle of love; and, unless controversy be carried on in the spirit of love, it is essentially unchristian. Error may, indeed, appear to be rooted out by the sword, or without such harshness it may be crushed and borne down by the mere weight of a stern authority, which seeks to overwhelm at once the erring brother and his doctrine. Speaking generally, however, such a mode of warfare will insure no lasting victory. It may silence the adversaries, and spread the solitude which we mistake for peace—it may induce a few to do violence to their convictions, and thus gain for the winning cause the aid of some treacherous waiters upon fortune. But, usually, error checked by force alone will spring up at last only the more vigorously. Heresy, as well as truth, has had its martyrs, and their blood has ever a fertilizing power. Persecution is always ultimately, and, unless it be so thorough as to shock all feelings of humanity, it is usually, even in the moment of its present triumph, as impolitic as it is unchristian. But St. John's example of love is a practical protest, not against persecution merely, but against all bitterness or violence even of speaking or writing as to those who are in error.

Setting aside all question as to the comparative truth or falsehood of the opinions advocated, we cannot fail to be shocked with that bitterness of satire and invective with which, for example, South assaults the Puritans. Supposing the doctrines thus advocated to be true, they never could be propagated with any benefit to men's souls by such carnal weapons. It is not meant that South is in this matter at all a solitary instance. The opposite party retaliated where they could with equal bitterness, and Christ's Church has been disgraced in all ages and countries by the bitter writings of unloving and unsanctified controversy.

To oppose error, except from a love to Christ and his truth, and the souls of our brethren, is only to be proudly bent on spreading our own opinions. Such opposition to error may, in many cases, be resolved solely into the love of power; and, taken at the best, it shows nothing better than the proselytizing spirit of the Pharisees, or that which once alarmed the world by the terrible alternative held out by Mahometan aggression. Those who would meet error as Christ and his Apostles met it, must combat it in St. John's spirit.

The characteristics, however, of St. John, as the Apostle of love, are by no means so simple as might at first sight be supposed. He was not merely the beloved, but also the loving Apostle; and active love cannot exist without earnestness—can never be perfect without a depth and intensity of zeal. The stern severity of the well-known passage in St. John's 2nd Epistle, v. 10, 11 ("If there come any unto you and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed; for he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds"), as well as

the legend of his fleeing from the pollution of Cerinthus, seem but to set forth, somewhat more fully developed, that same element in his character, of which we find plain traces in the history of the Gospels. It is the Apostle of love, of whom St. Luke (ix. 49) and St. Mark (ix. 38) tell us that he was rebuked because, when he saw one casting out devils in his Master's name, he forbad him, since he would not join the disciples' company. It was he, with his brother, who would have called down fire from heaven to overwhelm the Samaritan village which refused to admit Christ;* and this zeal was so prominent a feature as to justify the appellation given to both brethren of "the Sons of Thunder."† All who have even begun the study of Church history know Clement of Alexandria's story‡ of the young disciple rescued from his robber comrades by the aged Apostle's bold exposure of his life, if by any means he might win back his convert's soul to the love of Christ. And whether true, or merely legendary, this story represents the prevailing belief of the ancient Church, that St. John's predominating love was quickened by as active a zeal for his Master's honour as ever burned in the heart of St. Peter or St. Paul. His was, in fact, the very temper from which the best champions of truth are formed. They love Christ, and love him warmly—they are jealous for the honour of that truth of which his Holy Spirit has convinced them—but their love for their fellow-men, even the most sinful, is never swallowed up by zeal: and therefore they plainly show that they seek to win the sinner's soul, even when they denounce his errors with most severity.

* Luke ix. 51.

† Mark iii. 17.

‡ Given by Eusebius, H. E. iii. 23.

The depth of St. John's love was well suited to reclaim. It must at once have enabled him to enter fully into his erring brother's difficulties and peculiar temptations, and thus must have conciliated at the very moment that it opposed ; while the almost stern earnestness, which at times flashed out from his heart, showed that in essential truth he would admit of no indifference ; and that, while he would willingly die for those with whom he reasoned, he would not sacrifice to conciliate them one iota of God's real word. Now this last point, his zeal for truth, is important to be noted, before we pass on to another, perhaps the most striking of all the characteristics of this Apostle's writings.

2. It has been said that St. John's is the most spiritual Gospel. Certainly St. John's eagle flight does soar directly up to the throne of God, where he gazes on the most mysterious truths which concern the divine essence, and that incomprehensible bond which unites the human soul with the source of its life both spiritual and natural. We need scarcely mention in proof of this the introduction and the manifold discourses. Now we have seen that St. John wrote to confute or dispel error arising from the blending of Christianity with the strange transcendental philosophy of the East. But mark the mode which he adopts to combat it. It is the statement of a commentator, already often referred to, that "St. John's relation to the Gnosticism of his time is not merely polemical," but in part also what may be called "accommodative." This word "accommodative" may have a suspicious sound ; but it is here used in the best sense. This writer means that St. John recognises and fully allows the existence of a true divine *γνώσις*, such as that which the Eastern philosophy was in vain seeking by mere human

means, and through the exaltation of the intellect. It is by dwelling upon, and developing and encouraging men to follow after the true Christian *γνώσις*, that St. John seeks to supply those wants of the more philosophic mind, which led so many, while they professed to be following the simple Gospel, to wander quite away from it amid the misty speculations of heresy or heathenism. Thus he does not meet these errors by mere protest, or denial—by seeking to chain men's minds down when they wish to soar. He knows, that, as truth is certainly more in itself to be loved than error, so every error into which men fall is only attractive because it bears some resemblance to a truth; for no one would follow its treacherous glare unless he mistook it for a cheering light which was to refresh and comfort him: and therefore the only way to stop men's mad pursuit of it, is to set before them the true light, not to exhort them to remain contented in the darkness. It may safely be asserted that no heresy ever yet gained any adherents which had not some features of truth to recommend it to man's better nature; and the attempt to overpower error by mere protest and negation, if it affects men at all, will but make them infidels instead of heretics. It is the worst way of casting out the evil spirit from a man's head or heart, to leave its place empty, swept and garnished, ready for receiving back a more than sevenfold greater plague than that which at first tormented him.

Daily experience proves this. It is true, both of communities and individuals, that those who have long laboured under the malady of believing too much, do often when cured hurry into the worse malady of believing too little. Superstition is continually replaced by infidelity; as in like manner infidelity is often replaced by superstition. And this does

not arise merely from the fact that unsettled minds have a natural tendency to be continually vibrating from one extreme of error to another, and never resting in the central truth: the evil would seem rather to originate in those injudicious means which are so commonly taken to keep men right.

For, first, a man's mind is like a time-piece, which it is in vain to seek to regulate well unless you understand something of its secret mechanism. You may stop the hands violently from without when it goes too fast: but, if you do so, there is great danger that you will never bring it into accordance with the true time. For a short period it will go too slow; and, afterwards, when it has recovered the minutes it has lost, it will go too fast again. Thus, no one can hope to free his brethren from religious error, unless he is able to understand and appreciate those secret feelings by which they have been led astray.

And again, when these feelings are discovered, it is vain to seek to cure them by mere thwarting. Christ's religion is no dry unnatural system, which cannot be embraced by our minds till they have been forced into some formal mould contrary to their whole nature. As the Lord Jesus came to save and teach men of all times, countries, and characters, one of the clearest marks that His system is divine is to be found in its wonderful adaptation to every want of human nature. Each one may find full vent for what still remains of good and noble in his lost heart within the wide circle of Christ's real truth; and if any, following their natural bent, have hurried into error, there is but one wise course for seeking, by the aid of God's Spirit, to rescue them. The superstition of an exuberant imagination will never be cured

by prosaic arguments on the danger of a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels. The simple credulity of the uninstructed is not to be regulated by sermons upon evidences, nor the daring speculations of a philosophic mind scared by lectures on the temptations of human wisdom, and the blissfulness of ignorance. St. Paul showed that he, as well as St. John, had a deep conviction of this truth, when "he was made all things to all men, that he might by all means save some." * And a wise uninspired teacher will ever act like these two wise Apostles, first probing deep to find the real secret cause from which error springs, and then seeking to satisfy, by an exhibition of some portion of Christ's truth, those very longings which, unsatisfied, have, by their vain attempts to gain satisfaction, been the cause of all the error.

Now, it is vain to say that the Gnosticism of the Apostolic age was nothing but unmixed error and folly of human wisdom. Like every other heresy it reflected the shadow of many great truths. There is undoubtedly a *λόγος γνώσεως*, which St. Paul classes among the spiritual gifts; † and it was in an ill-directed pursuit of this, that men fell into the *ψευδώνυμος γνώσις* (science falsely so called)—that *φιλοσοφία καὶ κενὴ ἀπάτη*, of which St. Paul says that it was according to the tradition of men and the elements of the world, and not, like the true *γνώσις*, according to Christ. ‡

St. John then, as we have already said, presents the true *γνώσις*, as the only effectual antagonist by which the false is to be combated. Men, dissatisfied with all the systems of contracted religion which the world presented, were seeking a true philosophic religion suitable for all countries, and free

* 1 Cor. ix. 22.

† 1 Cor. xii. 8.

‡ Col. ii. 8.

from the restraints which confined it to one sacred time or place. Hear then St. John repeating the Lord's words: "The hour cometh when ye shall neither in this mountain nor yet at Jerusalem worship the Father.—The hour cometh and now is when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for the Father seeketh such to worship him.—God is a spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth." *

Again, men who wished to exalt those very debased notions of the Godhead in which the heathen were sunk, and yet to reconcile the idea of the Almighty's exalted majesty with the belief of some divine superintendence over this lower world, represented the Eternal Father as withdrawn altogether from any direct interference with mankind, and imagined for themselves those successions of emanating spirits, who formed as it were a connecting link between the Father and His universe.† Now, compare St. John's account, in his introduction, of the relation in which the Eternal Word stands at once to the Father and to us His creatures, thus:—"No man hath seen God at any time—the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." ‡

Again, did philosophers, in their mistaken eagerness to withdraw men's minds from the things of sight and sense, assert that the human soul was debased by all contact with matter, and that it never could be pure till it had been entirely freed from the body, and had become kindred to the Eternal

* John iv. 21, 23, 24.

† The difficulty which gave rise to this doctrine seems well illustrated in the comparison between the Almighty's supremacy and that of the great king, set forth in the 6th chapter of the treatise *περὶ κόσμου*, printed with Aristotle's Works, vol. iv., Lips. 1832.

‡ John i. 18.

mind? Hear our Lord in St. John:—"Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.—That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again."*

Lastly—for this branch of our subject is boundless, and we might go through the whole Gospel in illustration of it—did these men assert that the one object of the soul throughout our whole life should be, by giving itself to the pursuits of pure intellect to become united with God? Hear again St. John, repeating our Lord's words:—"If a man love me he will keep my words, and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him and make our abode with him."†

Wherever the Apostle can descry any truth glittering from amidst the mass of error, he turns to it eagerly and strives to purge away the dross that overlays it. He knows that there is in heavenly truth a most attractive power: he knows that, if the minds he has to deal with can only be once taught really to love that truth in its purity, which, in its debased and tarnished state, they are gladly idolising, they will soon come, by the help of Christ's Spirit, to prize truth alone, and carefully to separate it from the surrounding mass of erroneous and wicked teaching.

Besides, it ought to be remarked, that there were other heresies to be feared in St. John's time than that of the mystical Gnosticism. If the statements of history are accurate, the doctrines of the Ebionites were in many respects the very opposite of the Gnosticism of Cerinthus, refusing to recognise the Lord as more than a human teacher, and ever

* John iii. 3, 6, 7.

† John xiv. 23.

materialising where Cerinthus would have mounted to the sublimest intellectual heights.* Had St. John met his Gnostic antagonists by mere protest and denial, he might have encouraged a low materialising system almost worse than the errors he was opposing ; or, at best, another work would have been required, to vindicate the mean of truth. As it is, however, St. John's Gospel allows and appreciates those features in the Gnostic system which were opposed to what was low ; thus carefully does he guard his opposition, and as it were indirectly employ the truth on which one heresy was built to strengthen resistance to the other.

Yet observe, that in all this there is no compromise. The Apostle never forgets, that, though there are glimmerings of truth in the system he directly opposes, the great mass of it is dangerous and fearful error. He is not contented with correcting those false statements with which the true notions were adulterated, insisting, for example, on what the lovers of the false *γνῶσις* had forgotten, that the true religious wisdom is united indissolubly with faith—that it is only by active, obedient, loving faith, not by any mere effort of the intellect, that the Inscrutable can be known. Still further, he never hesitates to bring forward, in the most pointed way, those peculiar Doctrines of the Gospel which the Gnostics disallowed. Did they hold our Lord to be but the first of inferior spirits, emanating from God in time? St. John declares distinctly that he was in Himself the Eternal God. Did they hold that matter was essentially all full of evil, incapable of regeneration, and quite abhorrent from the

* Lücke, Comment. vol. i. p. 213. Cf. also Münscher's *Dogmen-Geschichte* (Cassel, 1832), vol. i. p. 254. Also Mosheim, *Hist. Eccl.*, sæc. ii, pars ii. § 3, and sæc. i. pars ii. § 16.

Divine nature? He asserts, without any qualification, that the Eternal Word became Flesh. Did they reject, as altogether shocking to their notions of the Deity, the possibility of the permanent union of any Divine being with the suffering Jesus? St. John enters into distinct historical details to show how the Eternal Son of God was insulted, crucified, died, and was buried.

So that, on the whole, we come on this point to the conclusion, that St. John's own mind being most naturally inclined to soar to the very heights for which his antagonists were ignorantly longing, the Holy Spirit of God employed him to resist those men by that union of conciliation with kind instruction and bold protest, which was most likely, speaking humanly, with God's assistance, to lead them to the truth.

III. It remains now, lastly, to turn from St. John's circumstances and personal character, to consider briefly the form in which he has made his stand against error.

Plainly, it must be for some wise reason that not one single book of Scripture is written in a directly dogmatical form; and if we ask why this is in the other books, the question occurs still more naturally as to a book written under the peculiar circumstances of St. John's Gospel. It might at first sight appear strange, if dangerous errors were prevailing amongst ourselves, that the answer to them should be, not any directly polemical attack on the arguments of the false teachers, nor any distinctly explanatory statements, like the Apologies of old, of that truth which its antagonists first misrepresented and then denied, but a history of those holy men by whom the truth we love was taught; yet observe, that,

with the difference of its being a history of the Lord, and not of any holy men, that lies before us, this is the very form by which the Spirit of God guided St. John to resist error. It is not the distinctive form either of dogmatical or of polemical writing which he adopts, either in this work, or when he exhorts his beloved converts, by letter, to beware of these same dangerous errors. In the Gospel he gives them history or biography; in the Epistles practical exhortations to a life of holiness: in both cases the form is adopted, if we may say so, not without the deepest wisdom.

There might, it is true, be that in the peculiar features of the heresy which St. John opposed, distorting, as it did, and misrepresenting, or explaining away, the facts of our Lord's birth, life, and death, which called for a plain historical statement as its best answer; even as in our own time the heretical or infidel misrepresentations of the 'Life of Jesus' have been answered by the great Ecclesiastical Historian of Germany, in a critical and historical narrative of the real facts.*

But there are also other and deeper reasons for St. John's here adopting this form. Who knows not that mere dogmatical statements of Christian doctrine are cold and powerless, compared with that spiritual energy with which it becomes invested when set forth in the holy lives and deaths of those whose every act and word embodied it? Surely the real secret of the great influence of what I will not hesitate to call the most truly religious section of our own Church, and of that wonderful progress which their opinions have made in England, from the days when a man was sure to be

* Neander's *Leben Jesu*.

reckoned a Dissenter or a fanatic for preaching them, is not to be found so much in any learned statements of consistent doctrine, in which these writers are usually regarded as deficient—nor yet in the powerful preaching of many of them—nor yet in that unwearied assiduity in their parish duties which was long the peculiar characteristic of the school; but rather in that silent influence which they gained in every family, as they found their way to the heart in those countless simple histories of holy men, women, and children, who lived and died rejoicing in the great Gospel doctrines, because they had taught them the love of Christ. Surely, also, Rome's wisdom is well shown in the mode in which she seeks to recommend her follies, by investing them with a holy interest in the lives of saints.

And if such be the influence of the lives of weak, and fallible, and sinful men, what wonder that the Holy Spirit suggested to St. John that no arguments against error, or laboured statements of systematic truth, could ever gain one thousandth part of the influence possessed by a simple narrative of what the Lord Jesus did and said! What cure for heresy like the thought of that converse which was living in the memories of all who heard it—the impression of which, once received even from the narrative of another, could never be erased from any feeling heart! Thus did God provide by the writings of St. John, that, to the end of time, if a man, brought up under Christian teaching, be ever tempted by vain speculations to adopt a mere intellectual or low rationalising theory of Christianity, he may have the thought of its deep spiritual fulness at once recalled to his heart, by the mere mention of the names of Nicodemus, and the woman of Samaria, or of the Upper Chamber and Garden in the suburb

towards Bethany, where our Lord spake those heavenly chapters which I suppose no earnest man ever read without emotion, which seem able to sustain us under every difficulty, and to give the most vivid realisation of Christ's presence that can be attained in thought on earth, till He comes again bodily and visibly to dwell with us for ever.

And now it only remains very briefly to recapitulate the various points wherein we have seen that St. John's Gospel is the Christian's model. At all times, whenever dangerous error is to be found in Christ's Church (and what age has there ever been in which dangerous error has not abounded?), St. John's example is much needed. Shall we say how much there is in our own age and country which makes it needed by ourselves? Wherever we turn in the world, do we hear the most solemn questions made the subjects of idle conversation and argument, even by those who are most unfit to speak of them? I know well that in this place such an evil is less prevalent than elsewhere; for here, thank God, there is too much good feeling to allow us thus thoughtlessly to handle things sacred. But still is the lesson very needful here. As this is the centre of theological teaching for our country, it must ever be also the centre of controversy: and it will be well for us to learn at all times from St. John, the holy and reverent, and loving and prudent spirit, in which, when compelled, we are to enter upon controversy—holding, first, that the chief qualification for it must be a holy life of intimate union with our Saviour—secondly, that without maturity of years and judgment we dare not enter on it—thirdly, that there can be no Christian controversy without Christian love, excited indeed and deepened by an earnest zeal which, in its turn, it softens—fourthly, that we can never

meet error successfully without being able to enter into those feelings in our brother's mind which have led to it, and without being prepared to allow these feelings their full scope and action, so far as they are innocent--and lastly, that no mere arguments will ever have any force, unless they be accompanied by distinct proof, from our own conduct and that of others on our side, that our opinions have been illustrated and enforced by a life of self-denying holiness. May we all (both old and young) remember, that to hurry into controversy without these rules attended to, instead of doing Christ service, is but to perpetuate strife, while we turn his holy Church into a field for our vanity, or pride, or opinionativeness, or at best for the display of an unsanctified zeal which can never save souls.

DISCOURSE II.

VARIETY IN UNITY.

 HEBREWS xiii. 8.

“Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.”

As these words are found in our version, the name of our Lord may seem, to a cursory observer, to stand grammatically in apposition with part of the previous sentence: thus, v. 7, “Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God, whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation:” and then follows our text, seeming to point out what is that end, viz., Jesus Christ, of whom the Apostle seems to predicate, as it were incidentally, that He is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. One glance at the original, however, will show that the passage cannot be taken in this construction. For, first, the words of the text being in the nominative, after the accusative preceding, form an entire sentence or clause by themselves, with the substantive verb in the original understood, “Jesus Christ *is* the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever:” and, secondly, the Greek phrase translated “end of their conversation” (*τὴν ἑκβασιν τῆς ἀναστροφῆς*), with which, in our version, the words Jesus Christ seem at first sight to stand in apposition, would be quite inapplicable to our Lord. The question that remains is, whether the whole clause,

“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever,” may be taken, as our translators seem to have taken it, as representing the sum and substance of the faith and conversation which is held up as a model: thus, “Whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation;” which, we supply, is the doctrine that “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.” But here the words *τὴν ἑκβασιν τῆς ἀναστροφῆς* again oppose a difficulty, being scarcely more applicable to the doctrine than to our Lord. With this view of the construction of the clause, it would be better to translate it in the order of the Greek: “Considering the end of whose conversation, follow their faith;” their faith, viz., that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.

But, on the whole, the passage is taken more naturally, according to that interpretation which is sanctioned by Lachmann, and those who with him connect our text, not with the 8th, but with the 9th verse, as the beginning of a new sentence, and as laying down the general principle on which the Apostle is going on to ground his exhortation to a particular duty: Thus, “Whose faith follow, considering the end (or result or termination) of their conversation” (or lives). Then “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever: be not ye therefore carried about by divers and strange doctrines.”

Now, it will be obvious that, whichever of these two admissible interpretations is adopted, as showing the true grammatical connexion of the passage, the whole words of our text stand out as a well-known Apostolical maxim. According to the one, they are considered as the sum of Apostolical doctrine, the grand statement that embodies a Christian’s faith: according to the other, they are at least the

readily-acknowledged general maxim on which the writer is about to build his particular deductions. Taken either way, the whole sentence seems to be brought forward as embodying a statement well known and highly prized throughout the Church.

Viewed in this light, the words, I think, become more solemn and important. They ought to be familiar to us, as to the early Christians. They speak of the true unity which binds together all the scattered portions of Christ's flock. The object of all our worship is one, the one Saviour, unchanging from eternity; and this, steadily kept in mind, will make our worship itself also one, in the only sense in which unity is of real value. The one Christ will be worshipped in the one acceptable way of a holy self-denying life by all who, being admitted into His church by the one baptism, are led by the one Spirit, in the hope of the one salvation.

And this unity of a holy purpose will lead much more than any enforced rules of outward uniformity—much more than, till they all try it, men can have any thought of—to the great blessing of perfect unity of belief and practice.

To exhaust this subject, or to trace fully those thoughts which even a superficial examination of it will suggest, is of course for us here impossible. The point in it to which I would at present direct attention is the following: That this oneness of Jesus Christ, the object of our worship, of which the Apostle speaks, does not exclude that diversity in our modes of conceiving of many of His doctrines, and of serving Him, to which the peculiar circumstances or character of each of us may naturally lead. God has not made all men alike: He has made the children of His universal family to differ, race

from race, nation from nation, individual from individual, by the grand distinctions of blood, climate, country, political state, and disposition; and our Christianity, though one and unchangeable in its essence, must, in outward appearance, vary with our varying circumstances. There is more truth than might at first sight be supposed in the Eastern simile, that, when the Almighty looks down upon the garden of the universe, which He has planted and waters for His pleasure, He is not delighted with that dull monotony which would force all the beds, however different their soils, to yield the same fruits and flowers; but what really pleases Him is to see each exhibiting in its own way the product of that better nature which He has given it, and putting forth in luxuriance its own peculiar riches as an offering in His honour.

Doubtless, this statement has often been so understood as to lead men to suppose that the Almighty is pleased, not with the thousand varieties of healthful flowers only, but also with noxious weeds, provided they be fresh and vigorous. This is the perversion of the truth which makes men forget that, however various may be the thousand forms of right, there is an immutable and indestructible separation between it and wrong.

But however capable of being perverted—however fruitful actually in producing error, the doctrine I now speak of does, doubtless, like most other principles which have become sources of heresy, point in itself to a great truth, which it was originally intended to express; and this truth is, that the one Saviour will be worshipped, and His doctrines apprehended, in many varying ways, by men of different natural dispositions and in different circumstances, and that to allow room for such varieties is absolutely necessary, if we would have any real unity of heartfelt earnest piety.

Now our text, so far from excluding the idea of this variety in the midst of unity, seems rather, when fully examined, distinctly to lead us to the acknowledgment of it, by referring us to the true unity as existing in Christ. If any one doubts this, let him consider the sense in which, in the text as elsewhere, the Lord Jesus Christ himself is spoken of as one and unvarying. "He is," the Apostle says, "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever:" yet is there endless variety in the forms in which He is manifested. First, He is the Eternal Word, residing quiescent from the beginning in the bosom of the Father: then He is His Father's active Minister, the Creator of the Universe: then He descends as the Angel of the Covenant to watch over the Jews, and gives them the law from Sinai; then He stoops still lower to be born at Bethlehem. He becomes the perfect child; the perfect boy; the perfect man: He is the suffering Saviour in Pilate's judgment-hall, and on the cross: He rises the powerful conqueror; reigns now the intercessor, the gracious Head of the Mediatorial Kingdom; and at last will be, for all who have despised Him, the inexorable judge.

The same awfully benignant features are doubtless to be traced, whatever be the stage of His existence in which we contemplate His heavenly image; but how endless is the variety of light and shade in which these features are presented to us! Holy minds, led by God's Spirit, will not fail, in whatever aspect they view Him, to note those grand characteristics of Him as a Saviour, which make Him one and invariable, the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world; but still they will love to dwell, according to their varying tempers or circumstances, each on different points of all that is revealed of Him. The mind of the religious youth will

delight to think of Him as subject to His parents; as seeking instruction, like other youths, in the regular channels, though astonishing all who heard Him by His understanding and His answers; as growing in wisdom as in stature, and in favour with God and man, and patiently waiting for the good time His Heavenly Father had appointed, before He began openly to announce His message. Again, in vigorous manhood, we shall be sustained and taught to sanctify our labours by the thought of Him rising up a great while before day, and retiring to solitude, that, braced by the new energy which communion with His Father gave Him, He might be ready when dawn came to begin that course of ceaseless toil for others, which was to fill every moment of His time till evening. Or if, again, in age we begin to think of rest in our families, we shall see Him in the house of Lazarus, or with John leaning on His bosom. Or, when sickness or death threatens, our continual meditation will be of Him in His agony. Thus, our thoughts of the one Christ are as various as the varying trials in which we need His example to encourage us.

In like manner, as in Christ himself, so also in His word, is there this endless variety in unity. Almost each book of the Bible, when attentively considered, will be found to have its own peculiar character of piety; and probably God has employed the various dispositions and circumstances of the several human authors as the means for bringing out the various features of Divine truth, and thus providing that each sacred writer should speak through all ages with especial force to minds of his own stamp. Thus, the most careless reader is led to contrast the searching practical wisdom of the Proverbs, with the exalted contemplative piety of the

Psalms; and in the New Testament it is scarce needful to mention the most commonly quoted instance of the different turn of thought observable in St. James and St. Paul—the one apparently accustomed, all the days of his manhood, to an unvarying* life of regulated holiness in daily attendance upon God's sanctuary—the other plucked suddenly as a brand from the burning, and sent to wander over the earth, preaching in season and out of season to the lost Gentiles the unspeakable riches of that constraining grace which could save both him and them. Nay, all allow that the very Gospels which give us the details of our Lord's history, have their several characters—that, while one gives us especially the history of His outward activity, as sent to be the long-foretold Saviour of His countrymen, and the promulgator of a better practical law than that of Moses; another, as we have seen, initiates us into the sublimest truths of His spiritual being, and seems to prepare our minds for such unearthly speculations, by setting forth Divine discourses, in which He no longer insists on particular duties, but rises to those mysterious heights of God's nature and of man's, in which all duties have their springs, but which cannot be ascended by any but the longing spiritual heart.

This thought, as to the wonderful variety in the different parts of the Bible, well deserves to be considered further. As the sacred subject of the teaching in the books varies, so does their outward form. Some would almost regard the Bible as the archetype of all human writings, the great Divine model, exhibiting each species in its perfectness. Not, however, to advance for it any such disputable claim, we have without any doubt in this one volume a literature of

* Vide Euseb. Hist. Eccl. ii. 2, 3.

almost every kind. To look at this in detail: in the Old Testament we have, first of all, the majestic simplicity of the narrative, that describes the patriarchal times with winning grace and power—captivating by its striking pictures the volatile fancy of childhood, and charming us in age into forgetfulness of all present troubles, by that freshness which breathes from the acts and words of those who lived when society was young. What legendary tales of Greece or Rome, or of the old Babylonian or Egyptian kings, can compare, even for mere attractiveness, with the holy story, in which God commissioned His servant to trace the origin of the chosen people, through the wilderness, and their slavery, up to the nomad tents of their great ancestor, and through him to the fathers of the human race? And these simple annals take their rise in a sublime revelation of the creation of matter by the all-governing and all-pervading mind, which separates them from human legends at their very outset, by causing them, in the midst of their childlike simplicity, to solve questions on which we shall in vain look for light in the works of the acutest uninspired intellects of the most cultivated age. Here surely, in the very form of this early history, is a variety in the midst of unity which proclaims itself divine.

Again, as we go further, we pass from the peaceful simplicity of the earliest to the stirring wars of the rude heroic times, in the tale of the gradual conquest of the promised land. Then succeeds the grave history of courts and camps, when Eastern civilisation was at its height; and interspersed are fair pictures of family and of rustic life, to win those whose homely spirits can scarcely gather lessons for their own daily guidance from God's dealings with the great of

the earth. Besides, we have the laws of the favoured nation in its political, its moral, and its ceremonial code, displayed with a minuteness to be found in no treatise on Spartan, or early Roman legislation, which, deeply studied, enable us to realise the daily habits of the people, while they may exercise also the ingenuity of the subtlest political philosophy to classify them, and refer them to their principles. Then come the grave ethical treatises, the experience of a long life passed in active duty, and arranged by a wisdom from above. Then, too, in poetry, we have the pastoral, perhaps the drama, and above all the lyric in its highest perfection, interspersed in the earliest history, or standing forth by itself as the model for the holy praise of all generations—various in its psalmody as the thousand varying feelings of the calmly thankful, or desponding, or repenting, or longing, or exulting, or persecuted, or victorious soul of God's servant: while the vista in this ancient choir is closed by the grandeur of the prophetic lyric, which carries on the bold longings of the ardent soul to the end of time.

Or turn again to the form in which God communicates His truth in the New Testament. Here are at least two different kinds of the most unadorned biography of the human life of the Redeemer; interspersed with the simplest moral lessons and the bright imaginative colouring of the parables for the childlike, acute arguments for the subtle, and the highest flights of heavenly philosophy for the contemplative. Then comes the plain history of the planting of the Church, and its struggles within and without, with Sadducaic and Pharisaic Judaism, with the sensuous classical, and mystic Eastern heathenism, again ending in a biography of the most energetic of the sons of men whom God employed to bear His truth

through the struggle. Then we have the letters of this great Apostle and his brethren, to churches of all kinds: to the holy Ephesians; to the Corinthians, sorely tempted to make a compromise of their faith with the Epicurean luxury and philosophy which surrounded them; against the stern Judaizers, who beset the Roman or Galatian Christians; or those who would have misled the Thessalonians into a political fanaticism. Or think again how, all through these letters, we have the plain practical morality of conscience, mixed up with the holiest and most mysterious of those doctrines which Christ came to reveal, and even with reasonings on those dark subjects of controversy as to the freedom of man's will and its slavery, which have agitated the philosophic mind under every system of faith or intellectual teaching. And here again, as in the Old Testament, the sacred vista closes with that wild prophetic poetry which thrills so deeply through every meditative heart, as it opens to us mysterious glimpses into the final destiny of our race, and the particular mode in which God will award happiness or misery to each individual soul.

So that, in fact, throughout the whole volume, what is scarcely intelligible and somewhat repulsive to men of one time of life or state of civilisation, is the very point which gives the sacred books their chief power to attract men of another tone.

Yet, through all this variety of Old Testament and New, we cannot fail to note the perfect all-pervading unity. There are the same lessons of holy living; the same truths as to God's nature and man's—more clearly marked indeed, and of a deeper colouring, as the tide of revelation swells, but still substantially the same; the same struggle of the fallen

human race with its great adversary is shadowed forth in all : but, above all, the whole Scripture is made one by the one holy image which every page reflects, the one Jesus Christ, himself the author and the subject of the whole, of whom Genesis speaks as the first creator, and the Apocalypse as the final judge—of whom every good man in its history is the type—whose sufferings and victory every prophet foretels—whose glory is hymned in every song of praise—who is set forth as by His Spirit alone giving the power to obey each practical lesson and understand each doctrine. Thus the whole Bible is as it were one heavenly instrument of music, tuned to sing the glory of Him who is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. And it has its harmony from the very variety of the notes which are blended in its symphony : and each ear which God's Holy Spirit has prepared to love the sound, has its own peculiar note in which it especially delights. Far then be from us the attempt to destroy the harmony by allowing no notes but one. Jesus Christ is brought before us, in the Bible, as all-sufficient to supply all wants, to cheer, sustain, to animate, to lead to victory ; for young and old ; for men of every age, climate, degree of progress in civilisation ; of all ranks, professions, talents, tempers. He is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever ; but in this sameness there is variety as infinite as that of His own Creation.

It would be easy to follow out this thought, and to show that this characteristic is to be found, not only in the mysterious features of the Lord himself, or in the subjects, or in the fashion of His heavenly volume ; but still further, 1st, in those very different forms of contemplative or active piety, which are embodied in the lives of His chosen servants ; and

2ndly, in the way in which His universal Church adapts itself to every age and country.

In the Bible how many and how different are the characters on which the Holy Spirit has stamped the seal of Christ's approbation! We have one form in the patriarch-chief, the priest as well as king and general of his people; another in the priest who in later days had no office but to wait on God's Sanctuary. We have one in the great king who adorns and extends his paternal realm, and cares daily for its laws, its commerce, and its literature; another in the mysterious prophet who flies from courts to the brook Cherith,* and who seeks converse with his Maker in the dark solitudes of Horeb.† We have one in the courtier-sage of Babylon; another in the fishermen of Gennesaret. We have ‡ Mary resting at Christ's feet; and Martha busy with many worldly cares, yet full of faith§ to acknowledge without any hesitation the coming resurrection. We have Anna and Simeon || waiting all their time daily in the temple; and Cornelius¶ full of alms and prayers in the midst of the duties of the Roman garrison. We have Paul the energetic, full of zeal; and John the meek, full of love. And so, to pass beyond the limits of sacred history, his mind must have little of a real Catholic spirit, who despises the wild retreat of the strange Egyptian hermit, because his soul kindles rather as he dwells on those public scenes in which Christ's truth was borne victorious in the sight of men, by the popular eloquence of Chrysostom, or the practical vigour of Athanasius; who cannot bear the homeliness of Latimer, because he loves rather to be instructed by the learning which almost

* 1 Kings xvii.

§ John xi. 24.

† 1 Kings xix.

|| Luke ii. 25, 36.

‡ Luke x. 38.

¶ Acts x.

overburdens the piety of Taylor; who has no admiration for the uncompromising zeal of Luther, because he has more sympathy with that winning gentleness with which Leighton sought in vain to teach men of different thoughts and tempers to live as brethren.

And various as are the characters of Christ's individual saints, so various also are the forms into which His Church has moulded itself, whether it sits in learned leisure, as amongst ourselves, seeking to rear teachers, and afterwards to help them by its prayers; or, actively engaged in its missionary work, either uplifts a warning voice, as in Apostolic times, in populous cities, or seeks for its scattered converts amid the stillness of American forests, or in the islands of the Pacific. The student of ecclesiastical history recognises the same Church, displaying itself under one form in the second century, under another in the fourth, under another in the sixteenth, and under another in our own. But in each, keeping always steadily in view its grand end, we see that it subserves also by its peculiar development some immediate secondary purpose for which its Lord had destined it. In the first and beginning of the second century, we see it gliding on its way silently, attracting but little the notice of the heathen authorities; in the third, raising its head, and gaining outward grandeur as it grows, that it may be the better ready, when God's providence calls it, to receive an imperial convert, and sit as a queen among the nations. We see it moulding itself into one compact body in the fourth century, that when civil ties were burst by the irruption of barbarian hordes, and the whole fabric of imperial civilisation seemed crumbling into ruins, in it the scattered elements of society might be again cemented into one enduring fabric.

By its influence we see the nations of Christendom, through the dark times that follow, forced to own another outward bond of union besides that of common wars, and to fear another powerful arm besides that which wielded the sceptre or the sword. Again, in the sixteenth century we see the same Church reformed, becoming in Protestant countries the pledge and safeguard of their separate life and energy for the several nations, as it had been before of the common life of all. Again, we hope to see it in our own day rise to meet our own wants, silencing sceptical doubts by solid arguments, or filling up the unsatisfied longings of the cultivated mind by a deeper philosophy and poetry than infidelity could ever dream of. And, as we look on towards the Lord's second coming, we see it promising at last in time, as the doctrines of love and charity gain ground in spite of all the accidental hindrances which now so much oppose them, to unite all the tribes of Europe, of the east, the west, and the far-distant south, into one holy brotherhood, in which each shall have full scope for the development of its own genius, while all agree to worship Christ, and teach each other to speak His truth boldly, though they speak it in love. The intelligent reader of Ecclesiastical History knows that the forms which Christ's Church assumes must vary with its duties, and that the field of these duties is as wide as the world which He has willed to save.

And now let us think briefly what is the practical result to which these thoughts conduct us. One lesson which they teach is obvious, that we must study to live in Christian peace with all who are bound together in this essential unity. The Apostle urges, "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men,"* and we make, surely, no great

* Rom. xii. 18.

demand if we substitute for "all men," all who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. As this lesson will teach us not to confine too much the limits of our own communion, so even where circumstances over which we have no control have made outward fellowship impossible, still shall we learn from it to study the fellowship of the heart. The most ardent attachment to our own holy forms, the most full appreciation of their efficiency in guiding our own souls in the way of life, nay, a conviction that under Providence our own Church seems more likely than any other to be our Lord's instrument in the great work of spreading a pure, and enlightened, and orderly Christianity throughout the world—our conviction of all this can have no natural connexion with any uncharitable feelings towards those who are not able to agree with us. "If," says Jeremy Taylor,* "the persons be Christians in their lives, and Christians in their professions, if they acknowledge the Eternal Son of God for their Master and their Lord, and live in all relations as becomes persons making such professions, why then should I hate such persons whom God loves, and who love God, who are partakers of Christ, and Christ hath a title to them, who dwell in Christ and Christ in them, because their understandings have not been brought up like mine; have not had the same masters; they have not met with the same books, nor the same company, or have not the same interest, or are not so wise, or else are wiser; that is, for some reason or other, which I neither do understand nor ought to blame, have not the same opinions that I have, and do not determine their school questions to the sense of my sect or interest?" When

* Liberty of Proph., Ep. Dedicatory, p. cccii. Works, London, 1839. Vol. vii.

will the day come when Christians throughout the world will remember, that, however great the differences which divide sincere believers from one another, these never can be one-thousandth part so important as those which ought to separate them by an impassable gulf from all who live in sin?

And here, lest this be misunderstood, it is well to speak plainly, and to state that this lesson must be taken with two limitations:—

1st. It will, of course, often be our bounden duty to protest against the errors of our brethren, and partially at least to withdraw ourselves from acting with them, although we believe them to be, according to their consciences, sincere followers of the Lord Jesus Christ; because, though they have the right foundation, they may have raised on it the vain superstructure of wood, hay, stubble; and may thus teach a system, which, though its poison cannot deaden their own ardent faith, has a strong tendency to destroy the life of all who are instructed by them. Thus we are bound to protest against Rome, and stand apart from her, even though we know her annals to be adorned by many noble saints; and, while we pray for her daily, as included in Christ's Universal Church, and revere with trembling the goodness which we acknowledge to be often growing within her pale, we dare make no compromise with her, nor speak lightly of her sins.

2ndly. The unity which binds us all together has the Lord Jesus Christ for its centre; with those, therefore, who are not one with us in Him, the text gives us no encouragement to live in Christian fellowship. If any regard the Lord and Saviour, who is to us the source of all our spiritual life, as a mere man, or a mere angel, or, what is almost worse still, as a

mere shadowy name—if any, while they profess to revere its author, have reduced Christianity to become one amongst many systems of poor human philosophy, while its words of life are placed in the rank of the early Roman legends; here is no pardonable variety, but a total change from what the Apostles taught; these men cannot be united with us in the worship of Him who is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.

It is always difficult, and would savour of presumption, to attempt to state distinctly what is essential in Christianity; but, happily, the most universally revered of the councils of the Church may here be our guide. The best symbol of universal Christian brotherhood with those without our own particular Church will be that which the Fathers of Nicæa and Constantinople instituted, when they bequeathed to us that Confession which alone has received the sanction both of East and West. And it is not unimportant to remark, in passing, that, in the explanation which the Nicene Fathers appended to their Creed, they have, as to the great doctrines it was composed to teach, recorded their protest against all attempts to add to, as well as take away from, the fulness of its perfect statements.* Those whose hearts are full of the certain heavenly truths of which this Creed treats, will have

* Vide Acta Conciliorum, Harduin, Paris, vol. i. p. 507, fol. 1715:—"Hæc est orthodoxorum et probatorum fides. Quorum autem omnium cognitio ex divinis Scripturis clare patet, et nos trecenti octodecim profitemur et confitemur atque cunctos protestamur hanc eandem esse fidem quam accepimus. Quamobrem maledicimus, anathematizamus et excommunicamus cunctos qui fidei huic aliquid vel addunt vel detrahunt." The original Creed, to which the explanation containing these words is appended, referred only to the doctrine of our Lord's nature, and His connexion with the Father. The Creed was completed, as is well known, when the articles on the Holy Spirit (with the exception of the "Filioque") were added by the 150 bishops in the Constantinopolitan Council.—Vide Harduin, as above; Mosheim's Hist. Eccl., Sæc. IV. Pt. II, § xx.

little leisure or inclination to be arguing on matters which are fairly disputable.

A second lesson, which the thoughts suggested by the text teach, is not less obvious than the first. In all our efforts to enforce Christ's truth, either on our brethren at home, or still more on men in other countries, we must be most cautious not to press on them a greater resemblance to ourselves than the Bible requires. If it be true that every natural temperament must have its fair room to work—that in the non-essential parts of Christianity what is suited to one honest and pious mind is repulsive to another—we must not fall into the error attributed to the Puritans, of forcing on the joyousness of childhood the austerity of age, nor strive to cool down all ardent feelings because we are ourselves calm and unexcitable. This surely is to confound our own prejudices with Christ's all-comprehensive truth; to put new wine into old bottles, and to act in direct opposition to the Apostle's precept of becoming all things to all men, if by any means we may win some.

But perhaps, after all, a third lesson, as it is the most obvious, is also the most important practically for each of us. Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever, is still, in the varying features of His heavenly character, suited to be the object which delights and sustains men of all natural dispositions, and under all circumstances. His religion also, brought home to our hearts, has as miraculously infinite a capability of adaptation to all our individual wants as He has himself. We can never, then, be in any circumstances in which we can be excused from acting directly on His example, and according to His commands.

Are many of you here now following the calm course of

well-regulated discipline, not yet plunged into the world's cares and harassing business? He is your model now during the thirty years of silent preparation for His mission. It is better to insist on this over and over again, than to point out the particular sins which you must flee from; for if any of you will steadily keep Christ's example before you, and try to realise the thought that He, your God, is by your side now in His Spirit, to sustain you against temptation, and lead you on to holiness, in the midst of the varied temptations of this place, you must live as Christians. Again, no one can tell of some of you when you leave this place, in what countries or professions your lot in life may be cast; but if what has been now stated be true, there can be no place where Christ and His religion will not follow you. There is no delusion more certain to ruin souls than that which so often whispers, that Christ's example and rules may be well suited for those in other circumstances, but do not apply to ourselves. There is, in truth, no place but Hell where Christ does not enter, no profession but the devil's service which He is not ready to sanctify. The soldier, the merchant, the sailor, the lawyer, may be, and often by God's grace has been, as directly employed in Christ's service as the minister of His inner sanctuary. If His Holy Spirit would only enable us to keep the thought of Him and His sustaining grace before us wherever we go, there would be no fear for us, either here or in still more dangerous scenes; for we might feel secure that He would guide us safely, and lead us to His everlasting kingdom.

DISCOURSE III.

DANGERS AND SAFEGUARDS OF THE CRITICAL STUDY
OF THE BIBLE.

ST. JOHN XX. 31.

“These are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God ; and that believing ye might have life through his name.”

IN considering these words formerly, as applied to St. John’s Gospel, it was natural to remark, that they set forth the object proposed not by St. John alone, but by all the Evangelists. But this statement may be extended much further. The words of the text may apply not to this or that portion merely of the Old or New Testament, but to the whole Bible : and of course they point out the object, not merely of the human authors, but of God.

Now I am the more induced to dwell on this point, because in a former sermon, in connexion with this text, we were led to certain historical and critical observations on the composition of one of the Gospels ; and the tendency of all such study of the sacred books, unless under very watchful guidance, must be to withdraw our minds in some degree from the one great spiritual object with which they were all written.

I propose now to examine some of the dangers of those perilous studies connected with the history and criticism of

the sacred volume, in which all in this place must more or less be engaged.

And first of all I would remark, that, in these studies, from their very nature, there can be no safety for us, unless by God's help we keep continually in mind that great truth which our text suggests: viz., that all the objects of the particular books, proposed by the particular human authors, in the particular circumstances in which they or their first readers were placed, are subordinate, and to be reckoned as nothing, when compared with this one great spiritual object of the whole, proposed by the Divine Author, viz., the salvation of lost man through Jesus Christ.

The chief of the dangers to which I have alluded arise necessarily from the very form in which God has been pleased to communicate the revelation of His will. No one can enter at all deeply on the critical and historical study of the Bible without having his attention very soon arrested by the following difficulty:—We hold, that, when the Lord Jesus Christ withdrew His inspired teachers from the world, and left His church to struggle henceforward without miraculous help, He ordained that His Apostles should leave behind them a complete body of Christian truth, perfectly sufficient, by the help of His ever-present Spirit, to guide each Christian's belief in all essential points, and thus to save his soul. We hold also that this body of truth is sufficient, by the principles which shine forth everywhere throughout its unsystematic, but perfectly plain teaching, to guide the uninspired rulers of the Church, if they will humbly seek to learn, in the formation of those varying rules of discipline, which must from time to time be laid down and changed by their authority, to suit the varying circumstances of each age.

Now, the question which very soon meets every one who studies the Bible critically, is this: How is the idea of this perfect completeness of the sacred volume to be reconciled with what criticism tells us of the gradual, and almost, as it were, fortuitous production of the several books? The obvious answer is, that the whole of this difficulty arises from looking merely to the human authors, not to our Lord himself, who by his Holy Spirit guided and controlled all for His one great purpose of which the text speaks.

To examine this more in detail—It is the key-stone of our Theology that Holy Scripture is complete: yet St. John says in the verse preceding our text, “Many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book.” Many other discourses certainly did the Lord hold with His disciples, both in public and in private, the memory of which has perished. Many others besides the four Evangelists (St. Luke intimates*) took in hand to set forth, in order, a history of the Lord’s life and sufferings; and if St. Luke, in the passage referred to, be speaking of inaccurate written histories, there must besides these have been, if not written, certainly many floating oral accounts of the Gospel narrative, coming from Apostles, and equally authentic, if they had survived, with those which we now reverence. Moreover, even if the lost Epistle to the Laodiceans† could be proved to be none other than that to the Church of Ephesus,‡ still St. Paul, and St. Peter, and St. James, and St. John, to say nothing of their fellow Apostles, must have written letters to churches and individuals, besides those which have come down to us. All these are lost: the

* Luke i. 1, 2.

† Coloss. iv. 16.

‡ Cf. Olshausen, *Bibl. Comment.* Coloss. iv. 16.

very names of them have perished: the utmost ingenuity of research cannot find either the works themselves, or any account of them in the remains of Christian antiquity. Very few of the many sayings of our Lord not recorded in the Gospels have been handed down to us, and these important only from the heavenly majesty of Him who uttered them.*

Now, it may be true that no one now, after the subject has been so thoroughly investigated, expects the canon of Scripture to be increased by the discovery of any lost writing of the Apostles. It is allowed that we know now all of the Apostles' teaching that by human means we can ever expect to know of it: but men not unnaturally ask,—How can that be considered as a complete code of Christian laws, and store-house of Christian principles, perfect in itself, which history and criticism show us to be thus fragmentary?

And from this difficulty may naturally spring many errors. On the one hand, if Scripture be supposed to contain but a small portion of what we may learn of God's revealed word, what more natural than to hold that its deficiencies must be filled up from some other stream of inspiration? At first, men may strive to gain the aid they need from some supposed remains of the unwritten teaching of the Apostles; but soon, forced by history and criticism in candour to admit that no such remains exist, they will more boldly throw themselves, with the Romanists, on the aid of an ever-present Church, which, claiming to be itself inspired, professes to fill up the scanty measure of Scripture-teaching from its own unbounded stores.

* Vide Acts xx. 35. Cf. Olshausen, in loc. Cf. also Fabricius, *Codex Apocr. Novi Test.* (Hamburg, 1719), p. 321, where these sayings are collected and classified.

On the other hand, if men be convinced not only that all the unwritten teaching of the Apostles has perished, but that these founders of Christ's Church have never had any inspired successors; that it was not till very degenerate days that any inspiration similar to that of Scripture was ever claimed for fathers or councils; that the signs of an Apostle have never been wrought by any but those to whom Christ at first gave them; what more natural than for one convinced of the impiety of such pretensions, who still looks on Scripture as very scanty, and knows not where else to turn, to give up the thought of being guided by inspiration altogether; to make human reason his guide; and to assign to the Scripture a co-ordinate place in his esteem with Plato, or Aristotle, or the Institutes of Justinian; as others have classed it with Cyprian, or Chrysostom, or the decrees of Nicæa?

Into one or other of these two species of error there is great danger lest all critical students of the Bible fall, if they do not, by the help of Divine grace, keep their eyes fixed on the Lord Jesus Christ as by His providence overruling the composition of the whole book, and making all the various wishes, and powers, and necessities of its human authors and first readers work together for that one grand object which He, its Divine Author, had always steadily in view.

The passage of Irenæus,* as to the number of the Gospels, is almost too trite for quotation: "As there are four quarters of the world in which we live, and four chief winds, and the Church is spread over all the earth, but the pillar and support of the Church is the Gospel and its breath of life, plainly the Church must have four columns, and from these must come forth four blasts breathing immortality and giving life to

* Adv. Hæres. c. iii.

men." Nor is this mere rhetoric. Each Evangelist, at the time when he wrote, had doubtless his own objects : he knew the wants of those for whom he wrote : St. Matthew, as a Jew to the Jews ; St. Mark, as a compiler for St. Peter's converts ; St. Luke, to edify Theophilus ; St. John, as a disciple of the true Gnosis, to spiritualise and thus destroy the false. But, as all the winds in their various courses are but the ministers of God's pleasure—each fulfilling its appointed office in the great work of purifying the atmosphere—so the labours of all four Evangelists together produce in unison that one history of the Divine and human perfection with which Christ has purposed to purify His Church. He employed each as a workman to form, according to his capacity, some one portion of that great statue of Himself, which He intended to be the object of His Church's adoration through all time. The workman might not aspire further while he worked than to complete his own allotted portion of the task ; but, if we would understand the whole, we must look to the designs of the great Master-builder who employed and directed all. And thus, when St. Paul, roused by the immediate wants of a particular church in his own day, took up his pen to write to the Christians of Galatia, the Lord Jesus still guided him, and ordained that the Roman, Galatian, Corinthian, Ephesian, and Thessalonian converts should be types of classes to be found in the Church in all ages ; so that all men might in them see their own likeness, and the book of these many fragmentary writings might be formed into one perfect whole.

Thus our Lord ordained. In this one book (however fragmentary its original composition) we find that one sufficient guide, for which we shall in vain seek in the works of mere

uninspired reason, whether pretending to no higher title than that of philosophy, or falsely claiming to be divine.

And thus keeping our eyes steadily fixed on God's one great purpose, as unfolded in the text, we shall never be distracted by our examination of the human motives which influenced the several human authors, or the circumstances which formed, as it were, the mould in which the heavenly metal was to be fused.

We have, then, seen a great danger to which the critical student of the Bible must be exposed. It is a very extensive danger, comprising under it many forms of evil, of some of which it may be necessary to speak more in detail.

Without a deep conviction of that all-important truth of which the text reminds us, it must, we repeat, be impossible to pass safely through this dangerous field of study. Perhaps there is no period in a thoughtful man's life, in which the crisis of his future spiritual being is more deeply involved than that in which he first begins critically to study God's holy word. So awful indeed are the results which may follow, and so many are the instances in which faith is altogether shipwrecked, that men advanced in years, who have themselves known the peril, cannot think without fear of the duty of leading their younger brethren to enter on this field, when God's Providence has imposed this duty on them as teachers in His Church. The strong practical bias of the English mind may have prevented the danger from being so clearly developed amongst ourselves as in foreign countries; but still is there, even in our own country, enough to warn us. We need not go abroad to look for instances of men who, having begun with the simple belief of childhood, have plunged thoughtlessly into the enticing field of Scripture

criticism, reckless of the hidden pitfalls which on every side beset their way; and such men, whose minds are not sufficiently imbued with a deep conviction of the sacredness of the task on which they enter, have often fallen, first into cold doubts, then into so-called philosophic indifference, and lastly into daring unbelief. No wonder, then, that a man of thoughtful mind should long pause and hesitate before he engages himself, and still more before he leads others to engage, in studies amid the mazes of which his soul may so easily be lost.

We may, indeed, feel that perfect conviction which the Holy Spirit works in humble hearts, that the everlasting arms of our Lord and Saviour will be beneath us to sustain us in every hour of peril, and that, provided we be in the path of duty in our studies, we must be safe; but, even with this feeling, there is much to disquiet us. The faith of him who is carried safely through these studies may, it is true, be of a higher order intellectually, and become even morally more perfect, because it has stood some trial, and by the grace of God has gained manliness as it has been kept unscathed; yet, still in the various steps of the struggle which it has undergone, there has been unhappiness and danger.

When the simple lessons which we learned in childhood are first examined by us with a critic's eye, who shall explain the strange feelings that spring up within! In self-confident and thoughtless minds, nay, perhaps in all, there will be at first a burst of that enthusiasm with which youth and vigour scarcely ever fail to welcome an emancipation from controlling power. If this feeling continues, the danger is imminent, and the soul must suffer grievous loss. But the humble, faithful, and loving heart, if it gives way to this feeling for a moment,

will soon return to sober thought, and will be almost more disposed to long for the return of those happy days of childhood, in which it never knew what doubts were, than to look forward with any confident anticipation to that full manhood in which, by God's help, after having known, it will be sure to vanquish them. While the mind is in this perplexed state, it will look almost with envy on the contented acquiescence of the uninstructed poor, who have never dreamed of any difficulties, and whose faith reposes happily on those detached portions of the authorised English version of the Scriptures with which they happen to be familiar, as affording for all their needs a full and satisfying supply from God's living oracles.

And if this state of perplexity be not merely a short transition-state of trouble, from which, by God's mercy, our minds soon pass on to more certainty of faith, we may well envy the most ignorant. To these, God's ever-present Spirit makes their acquaintance with His will, however limited, to be a sure foundation, while we, still doubting, shall be able, in all the wide range on which we seek to build, to find nothing but shifting quicksands.

Now, I believe, that in all the worst and darkest difficulties of an inquiring mind, even if the genuineness and authenticity and inspiration of the holy books be themselves brought into question, every man will be comforted and kept in safety who fixes his thoughts steadily on that portion of the great truth suggested by the text which his present unhappy doubts will allow him to receive. The Almighty Father wishes the happiness and salvation of all His children: no man with an honest and good heart ever doubted this. These books claim to have been written under His especial guidance, that men

believing them might have life through Christ's name—a claim which the good and wise of all times have been the more ready to admit, the better and the wiser they have become. The books have doubtless a very striking majesty about them, which must command respect; so that, however we may doubt, it will be madness to refuse to study them with reverent attention, and, thus studying them, we must at last, by God's help, be safe.

We have seen, then, enough to convince us of the unsettling tendency of the studies of which we are speaking; how apt they are to lead the mind into scepticism; and from scepticism the rebound is very natural into that blind deference to authority which shuts its eyes to all reasoning, because, through fear of harassing doubts, it dares not any longer to think.

And here two questions now very naturally arise. If the critical study of the Bible be thus beset with very serious difficulties—if in many minds it be very likely to shake their conviction of the perfectness and all-sufficiency of God's holy word—if it suggests, as we advance in it, an infinite number of doubts as to particular passages or particular books—if every man who engages zealously in the study is sure to have his mind, to a certain extent at least, and for a time, unsettled—First, Why should we engage in the study at all? and Secondly, If we are forced to engage in it, can we really pass through it safe?

The answer to the first of these questions is obvious. The study must be engaged in by persons in the circumstances of most of us, because God has willed that it should be indispensable. We may, indeed, wish that God had so ordered man's mind that no doubts had ever arisen in it—that the very sight of the Bible had caused a conviction of the truth

and divine authority of every part of it to flash on every mind—that it had been written in some universal language, which required no aid of translations to be intelligible in every land—that there had been no verse in it at all difficult in structure or meaning requiring to be illustrated from the human author's habitual mode of expression, or the circumstances of his age and country. But whatever we may wish, this has not been God's plan: He has given the revelation of His will in such a form as requires the aid of man's other light of reason to make it plain. Nay, He has even ordained that, as an understanding of His truth is not forced upon us by the mere letter of His word, the mode in which we exert ourselves to obtain an insight into its full meaning shall be, to many of us, the trial of our faith. Thus we may see generally how, for very many of us, this critical study of the Bible is indispensable.

And this point, if established, involves also the answer to our second question: God cannot have made it an imperative duty to enter on any course of study in which He is not ready, by His Almighty power, to shield us. But the full answer to these two questions is so important, that it may well occupy by itself a whole discourse. Having now pointed out some of the chief dangers of these studies, we may, by God's blessing, inquire more fully at a future time; first, into their absolute necessity; and secondly, into their safety. At present let us content ourselves with the prayer, that if we are led by duty to engage in them, we may do so, by the help of God's Spirit, in all humility and never in self-confidence.

DISCOURSE IV.

DANGERS AND SAFEGUARDS OF THE CRITICAL STUDY
OF THE BIBLE.

ST. JOHN xx. 31.

“These are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God ; and that believing ye might have life through his name.”

IN my last sermon I endeavoured to set forth some of the great dangers to which the critical student of the Bible is exposed, from the unsettling tendency of many of the speculations into which he is necessarily led. I will not now recapitulate what was said in pointing out the nature of these difficulties ; every earnest student will be sure soon to encounter them, and understand their nature, whether it be to the strictly philological or to the historical department of Scripture criticism that he applies himself. This criticism, whether it speaks directly of the language of the Bible, or of the circumstances and habits of the authors by whom that language is employed, or tells us what is known of the history of the several documents which compose the volume, directs our thoughts always to the contemplation of the human vehicle by which divine truth has been expressed. There is danger, therefore, always, lest we forget the divine in our contemplation of the human—lest, while we learn to handle familiarly the outward case, our thoughts may be withdrawn from the jewel of countless price which it contains.

Leaving, then, these difficulties to speak for themselves and explain their own nature, I proceed to a more full consideration of the two important questions formerly proposed. If the critical study of the Bible be thus beset with very serious difficulties, first, why should we engage in a study so confessedly dangerous? and, secondly, if we do engage in it, can we really pass through it safe?

I. Now, in examining the first of these questions, we must observe,—

1. That the critical study of the Bible must be necessary at all times, for without such study we cannot arrive at its real meaning. This, as has been observed above, is a consequence of the form in which God has been pleased to reveal His will. Not to dwell on the obvious fact, that the Scriptures have been written in languages now dead, which, before they can be understood, must be translated into our own, and that these translations must, from time to time, be tested, if we are to feel any security that they are correct—it is almost equally obvious that, even when translated, the books require aid of illustration and comparative criticism to make their meaning plain.

It is granted, indeed, that the great truths on which our salvation depends, are so plainly set forth in the statements of the Bible, that, when once the learned have translated the book into our mother tongue, he who runs may read and understand these statements sufficiently, if he read them with a humble heart. It is granted also most fully, that for those great essential truths, which are, I believe, in name at least, and outward profession, assented to by the great majority of those who call themselves Christians throughout the globe, the teaching of God's Holy Spirit is a readier and far better

guide, needing but little aid of human criticism. But the truths, a belief of which is essential for our individual salvation, are very few as they are very simple. And no one doubts that the Bible contains, besides these, many other truths, some plain, and others hidden beneath its surface, which God would not have caused to be written there, had He not intended them to be in some way influential on man's conduct, and therefore, indirectly, on his prospects for eternity. From the passages containing these, all our lengthened dogmatical statements of Christian doctrine are to be at first derived, or afterwards tested. It is very frequently a man's conviction of the truths to be found in such passages, which causes him to adhere to one division of Christ's Universal Church rather than another. And these are the very passages of which the true meaning cannot be settled without the aid of criticism. Hence there can be no question as to the necessity of this study for all Christ's ministers, and for all among the laity also to whom He has entrusted leisure and ability and learning to be used in His cause.

2. Again, let it be remembered, that if these studies be discouraged, men will lose a great help which God intended should assist in enabling them to realise the full force and power of both the narrative and the directly doctrinal teaching of the Bible even in its plainest parts. Who is there brought up in a Christian country, who does not find great difficulty in forming to himself a well-defined and vivid picture of those truths, with the expression of which he has been familiar from his childhood?

Doubtless, the power of calling up in our minds these vivid pictures, is something very different indeed from

saving Christian faith, which is an energetic habit of our whole spiritual nature, and not of the imagination, however chastened and directed aright. But neither can it reasonably be doubted, that our faith may be much assisted by such vivid conceptions of the Gospel truths, in the same manner as the usual lifeless and formal way in which we think of them is a serious stumbling-block to many. How many are there of us to whom the several Apostles or Prophets are but names, suggesting no traits of individual character either in their actions or their writings; who look upon the several Gospels or Epistles but as convenient divisions or heads of chapters, for enabling us more easily to make our references to the sacred book, without having ever realised the particular, definite purpose and distinguishing features of each! How many are there of us before whom the whole sacred history and its doctrines float with all the indistinctness of a confused and misty vision, leaving but a vague and dull impression, such as intelligent men would never be content to have received in any matter of mere human interest to which their attention had been drawn! There is not more difference in the study of ordinary history, between that vague catalogue of the names of kings, and the dates of their births and deaths, with which the memories of children are often unwisely burdened, and that clear picture of men's thoughts and deeds and mode of living, which an intelligent student delights to form, from the annals and private memoirs of an age which has excited his keenest interest, than there is between the dull assent which most men give, as a matter of course, to what the Bible tells them, and that lively conception of all its various truths, which a soul, at once faithful and

intelligent, may, by the blessing of the Holy Spirit, gain from an earnest study of the whole Bible, with all those many human aids which God provides for us.

Doubtless, God's Spirit does compensate for the want of this assistance to His faithful poor and illiterate servants ; but, for those of us whom He has blessed with leisure and ability, there is no human means more likely than this study for enabling us, by His aid, to live with an ever-present feeling of the reality of those unseen friends and interests of which the Bible speaks to us.

3. There is a third reason which obliges us to encourage the critical study of the sacred writings ; even the very fact that many difficulties are known to attach to it. Speaking humanly, there is scarcely anything more likely to spread infidelity amongst us, than the existence of a general suspicion, that many doubts and difficulties are involved in the criticism of the Bible, which no one has the courage or ability to grapple with. Akin to this, is that miserable distrust which the impolitic severity of the laws has often allowed infidels to spread, by insinuating that they could say much against Christianity, if they were not restrained by the fear of civil penalties.

Wherever a general suspicion is engendered, however unfounded it may be, that something is amiss in our system of religion, which from policy or cowardice we are anxious to conceal, there hidden infidelity will make rapid progress, and many a man of honest mind will in secret be tortured with anxiety, having no leisure to examine for himself the difficulties he has heard of, and be distressed by a painful impression that those who ought to examine for him are deliberately or unwittingly banded together to mislead.

Thus, as is usual wherever men take upon themselves to act against God's purposes, that very infidelity, the fear of which scared them from their duty, will grow with tenfold vigour because they have neglected to perform it.

And here it seems well to remark, that the critical study of the Bible is more than ever necessary to be encouraged now, from the particular circumstances of our own age and country. Whatever may be thought of the honesty or policy of endeavouring to conceal difficulties and stifle inquiry formerly, the days when such methods of propping up the truth of God were possible, are at an end. Or—not to speak harshly of the well-meant conduct of good men in former times—for us in this country the days when the minds of the mass of men could be directed, as if they were children, and withdrawn from all dangerous speculations to those thoughts which their superiors in education considered to be edifying, have passed away. The old times, with their mingled good and evil—the old ideas of the paternal duty of government both in Church and State to lead the mass of men as it were blindfold, and to shut up knowledge within the privileged caste of those who were thought likely to make a good use of it, have passed. We may look back on the retiring scene, and while its less pleasing features are softened by the effect of distance as it fades from our view, we may long to recall it—some may even wish, in their day-dreams, that they had lived four hundred years ago; but, whether it were good or whether it were evil, the old state of things can never be brought back. It is in our own generation, and amid the men of our own generation—amid their thoughts, bad as well as good, their questionings and doubtings, and shallow disputations, as well as their energetic impatience of con-

cealment and hatred of all formalism, that God has placed the scene of our responsibilities; and it is vain to think that we can do any good amongst them by attempting to teach them on the principles of a departed state of society, and not as their own characters and circumstances require.

It is certain that every man in this country who can read, either knows already, or may learn any day as he reads, what those difficulties with respect to the Bible are on which infidels insist; and it must be well also that he should know their refutation; or, better still, that he should feel that confidence which is inspired by a persuasion that good and learned men have candidly met these difficulties, grappled with them fairly, and vindicated the truth. Nor can this service be said to have been performed for us by the able writers on Evidences of the last age; for, since their time, infidelity has much changed the grounds of its attack. Its objections are much more connected now than in former times with a minute critical examination of the sacred books; and therefore it is in the field of criticism that it must be met and overthrown.

Nor is it for the sake of those beneath us only that such protection is required. A calm review of the history of our Church from the Reformation downwards, will probably convince us that almost every generation, as it has had its own peculiar character of theology, has had also its own peculiar dangers for the learned as well as for the ignorant. One or two men of leading minds have had their thoughts directed in some particular channel by their early education, or the society into which they have been thrown, and all the world of their contemporaries, eager for novelty, has hastened in the path they pointed out. Or, again, political events have

occurred which have forced on men a reconsideration of principles long deemed irrefragable; or, opening up fresh intercourse with foreign nations, have imbued us with a taste for the theology or philosophy which they admire.

Now of course it would be presumption to speak confidently as to the particular direction in which men's minds are likely to wander during the coming age. But there can be no wisdom in refusing to form reasonable conjectures, because we are not gifted with prophetic power. Our attention has been of late so much and so deeply occupied by the unexpected revival of the controversies which were fought out and really settled at the time of the Reformation, and, in this place especially, the errors we deplore, connected with this controversy, have been rendered so deeply interesting, from what we know of the personal excellence of those who have been most prominent in maintaining them, as well as from the many ties of almost sacred friendship which these controversies have burst or rudely tried, that we are apt very naturally to over-estimate the importance of what, for the moment, we see actually around us. Yet, if we examine the real state of our country and of Europe altogether, we must allow that the great conflict of this age is not that between the Romanist and the Protestant, but between the Infidel and the Christian; and that Romanism is for us principally formidable only from the advantage it must give to infidelity by the false foundation on which it teaches men to build their faith, and the poor human superstructure by which it weakens while it overloads the inestimable power of Christ's simple truth. It is certain that, as Romanism spreads, Infidelity will spread also. But we must not mistake therefore the nature of our real contest: and there is

much danger lest the noise and interest of our immediate disputations with those whose errors we are right deeply to deplore, but who still love the Lord Jesus Christ, and seek, in their own mistaken way, to maintain His cause as eagerly as ourselves, lead us to neglect the greatest danger which threatens us from the enemy that abhors Him. Infidelity also, be it noted, is always most active and most to be feared while disputes distract the Church.

Now there are many symptoms to warn us that, if such an attack from Infidelity as is reasonably to be apprehended should be made, we are not as yet prepared as we ought to be to meet it. It is sure to come upon us now-a-days in a new and subtle form, often arming itself with its most formidable weapons from the very storehouse of the Sacred books. And is it not certain that there are many questions connected with the authenticity and authority of these books on which we, in this country, with all our vaunted learning, are not as yet prepared with the requisite information and thought to enable us to vindicate the truth? Is it not too true that the great majority of serious men feel themselves quite taken, as it were, by surprise, when such difficulties are forced upon their notice? And if the watchmen of Israel have not looked their danger steadily in the face, how can they be prepared to meet it?

Moreover, it is well to remark, in passing, that we are ourselves (in many respects very properly) encouraging studies in matters of secular literature, which are sure in time to suggest to all minds that the freedom of inquiry which they engender may sooner or later be applied also to the Sacred books. And yet, while we encourage these studies, and therefore deliberately run the risk of all the danger that

must follow from them, we have taken little pains to provide ourselves with that knowledge which is absolutely necessary to prevent them from being perverted. How few of those, *e. g.*, whom we train to a free examination and discussion of the early Roman History, are able to understand and show to others that its doubtful legends have their counterpart in the spurious Gospels or the Rabbinical traditions of the History of Abraham, and that, in trusting the real Sacred books to the rejection of these fables, we are already, through God's mercy, resting on that sure basis of historical truth with respect to Christianity and the older Revelation, on which the great Roman historian wishes to place us as to his subject, by his laborious research !

The difficulties that threaten to come upon us are then to be met, not certainly by closing our eyes to the danger, and looking with suspicion upon those who would prepare themselves to meet it ; not by lagging behind our age, and allowing our minds to be engrossed with the refutation of errors which have already had their day ; but by seriously applying ourselves to those many and very severe studies which are absolutely indispensable as the discipline that is to train us for the coming warfare. Speaking humanly, if infidelity is to be resisted, it can only be by our opposing the true criticism to the false, and being able to bring as great an amount of philological and historical knowledge and deep research to aid the cause of Christ's truth as are sure to be employed in the assaults by which it is menaced.

The young student of Theology has indeed before him, at this time, a very great and noble task, which, by its very difficulty, may stimulate him to exertion. There is no power of his mind which may not find an adequate employment in

those great studies to which the exigencies of the Church seem to summon him. It would be ruinous to put off accustoming ourselves to these investigations till the necessity becomes urgent—to neglect to train our troops till the enemy is at our gates. Many years must be given to the diligent study of the language and history of the Bible, if we would be ready to defend it when infidelity assails. And even independently of the heavenly nature of the subjects with which we are brought into familiar intercourse, and the promise of God's Spirit, which gives our whole occupation an ennobling character, there is no study in which all our powers of memory, judgment, reasoning, imagination, may better find an adequate field for their activity than this criticism of the Holy books.

II. But it is full time to turn now to our second question: Useful as these studies may be, can we really pass through them unhurt? The answer has already necessarily been in part anticipated. God cannot have made it the imperative duty of His servants to enter on any course of study, without being ready to shield us, while engaged in it, by His Almighty power.

Moreover, we must not too greatly magnify the dangers that beset the critical study of the Bible. Whatever anxiety we may justly feel as we enter on it, we must not forget that dangers, the same in kind, beset the whole field of theological inquiry. If Theology be that science in which man clothes in human language, and classifies under human divisions, what Revelation suggests to him of God, there must always be danger for the student, lest he lay a rash human hand on the Divine Ark, and tread with soiled feet

upon the holy ground. Whenever the divine and the human are thus brought into close proximity, it requires no small degree of faithful reverence to enable us, while we probe and examine and test, still to worship with humble adoration whatever is shown to be divine. No man who regards the welfare of his soul will dare to enter on theological studies at all without anxiety and prayer—whether his duty call him to the difficult and dangerous task of examining creeds and articles, and, while he traces their history and construction, thus separating between the formal human expression and the divine spiritual essence which it encases; or whether, ascending the long stream of the Church's history, he is called to point out, in examining its teaching, the almost imperceptible line which, in early times, before they had joined in one discoloured flood, separated the pure living waters of life near their source from the foul streams of false doctrine which were continually flowing in and striving to adulterate them.

In fact, throughout the whole of Theology there are difficulties similar in kind to that which must have often shaken the faith of the Apostles and of the Virgin Mother, when called to recognise the Eternal Word, the Creator of the world, in Him, whom in his humble fleshly nature they had so often seen and heard and handled in the intimate familiarity of daily life. This is the very difficulty which has made some inquisitive travellers return infidels from the holy countries—men who have come, from their very familiarity, to deem it impossible that God Almighty could ever have spoken in accents of thunder on those mountain peaks, or the Eternal Son have wrought His divine miracles on the

borders of that lake, or in the streets of those towns, all of which are now associated in their minds with the commonplace details of their ordinary travel.

In fact, similar dangers pervade our whole life. It is well for us to remark, that the danger of error is not entirely on one side. There is in all the world that strange blending of the divine and human which makes it very difficult for us, thus brought into contact with the two united, to escape the danger on the one hand of superstition, on the other of irreverence. It requires a strong mind and a strong faith to steer between the two. While this man regards the holy countries with the indifference of scepticism—refusing to believe, because of the commonness of their appearance, that heavenly works were ever wrought in them—another is undertaking a laborious pilgrimage, and paying to their mere soil and locality that reverence which is due only to Him whose presence once ennobled them. It is in the same spirit that, while some degrade the sacred volume to the level of a profane classic by their irreverent criticism, others would superstitiously warn us not to study it with any real accuracy, as a thing too sacred to be touched by human learning.

Now, without doubt, it is in all cases very difficult for men, in a reverential and yet intelligent spirit, to examine minutely any compound of the divine and the human elements, and to pay to each its due regard; but the duty of thus distinguishing is so continually imposed on us in life, that, as has been said already, we may safely trust our Heavenly Master, if we are humble, to keep us right. Look, for example, to God's providential judgments. We need scarcely be reminded of the difficulty of distinguishing

between the influence of human second causes, and that controlling power which proceeds direct from Him. Now, in this particular instance, to neglect either the divine or the human element is to run at once into serious error. If we neglect man's part, we seem to be fatalists: if God's, we are practically atheists; but there is no reason for neglecting either. And so is it also in all our critical study of the Bible. As a frail body and an immortal soul are united in every human being—as the body is allowed to affect and operate upon the soul—as Christian doctrine does not make a sharp distinction between the two elements of body and soul in man, but teaches us to allow each its due scope in fulfilling the object of our compound being, since we know that the Lord Jesus has glorified even that element which is inferior and vile—so in God's word the two elements of the divine spirit, and the human form or expression, are united indissolubly: yet are they not to be confounded, or to be treated both alike. And there is no reason, because we treat the inferior element with that freedom with which God has willed it to be treated, on the very ground that it is inferior—there is no reason for our thereby losing our reverence for that element which is Divine.

We return, in fact, in conclusion, to the point from which we set out. Let us remember, when we begin the critical study of the Bible, that God Himself has been believed by all the best and wisest of men to be in the highest and truest sense its author; that He is asserted, as our text reminds us, to have caused it to be written for the most important of all objects: viz., that men may believe that "Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, and that believing they may have life through His name:" let us accompany our study with earnest

prayer for guidance, knowing that we are engaged in a serious task where there are many perils, and the Lord Jesus will Himself lead us on in safety. If we study critically in this frame of mind, we shall never forget to adore the Holy Spirit their guide, while we trace the character and style of St. Matthew or St. Paul as modified according to God's purpose by the temporal circumstances in which He placed them. We shall be as little likely to admire the poetry without bowing to the inspiration of the Prophets, or to overlook the wisdom of Almighty God while we think of Moses's Egyptian learning, as we shall be to forget that there is a hand which can direct the thunderbolt at will, because we have learned something of electricity, or to deny the divine creation of the world, if geology could teach us to mark the stages of its formation; or to deride the truth that ungodly nations are visited by God's vengeance, because we can trace the gradual progress of their commercial or military decay.

In fact, all studies, and the critical study of the Bible, like all others, while they are a savour of death unto death to those who hurry into them in wanton self-confidence of shallowness and pride, may most surely be used to God's glory by those who enter on them thoughtfully with a faithful and praying heart. And both we who teach and those who are taught, and those amongst us, above all, who live the life of speculative students, will do well to remember how solemn a trust the Lord Jesus Christ has committed to us in giving us our acuteness, or our leisure, or our knowledge, to be employed in the study of His Word.

DISCOURSE V.

THEOLOGY, BOTH OLD AND NEW.



2 TIMOTHY iii. 14-15.

“But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned, and hast been assured of—knowing of whom thou hast learned them ;

“And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation.”

SURELY no criticism will ever shake our belief that this Second Epistle to Timothy, even though it may not contain St. Paul's last written words, has yet been providentially preserved, and caused to find its place in the holy volume, especially for this, amongst other purposes, that it may set before us the frame of mind in which the Saint did contemplate the near approach of his martyrdom. Think of the express declaration in the fourth chapter (v. 6), “I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand,” which in the original is even stronger—*ἐγὼ γὰρ ἤδη σπένδομαι καὶ ὁ καιρὸς τῆς ἐμῆς ἀναλύσεως ἐφέστηκε*—(v. 7) “I have fought the good fight, I have finished my course.” To this add the exulting strains whereby he gives utterance to the assurance of his faith—which, contrasted as they are with the almost fearful diffidence of an earlier epistle,* seem to speak of the songs of angels already bursting on his ears and heaven opening on his dying

* Philipp. iii. 12.

eyes, and Jesus visibly manifested “standing on the right hand of God”—“I have kept the faith,” “Henceforth there is laid up for me” the “crown of righteousness” (vv. 7-8), and “The Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom” (v. 18). Think also of what have not unnaturally been considered the preparations for his trial—as the call for the important parchments which he had left at Troas (v. 13): think of the apparent allusion to his first hearing before the emperor (v. 16), and the danger of the lion’s mouth (v. 17)—of the keen feeling that he is deserted by human aid, but the Lord stands by him and strengthens him, and enables him to bear testimony to the Gospel before the Gentiles who are trying him—of his prayer for the timid friends who had left him. In all this there is much to remind us of the closing scenes of Stephen and of the Lord himself. And, if there be a hope expressed that his ministry is not yet ended, in the desire for the return of Mark (v. 11), who had once deserted him,* but was now ready to be his “profitable” helper; and in the anticipation that he should yet outlive the coming winter (v. 21)—these will still not prevent us from regarding the Epistle as written when St. Paul saw that a speedy death was very probable, and therefore as containing what he wished to be his dying injunction to his son in the faith; “I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom.”†

Now, if this inference be correct, it adds a peculiar solemnity to our text; it enables us to consider St. Paul’s ministry as almost closing, in the words now before us, with an earnest exhortation quite similar in principle to that which ends the

* Acts xv. 38.

† 2 Tim. iv. 1.

writings of St. John.* Each of these Apostles, as he sees his death draw near, seems to warn his disciples that they must beware of either impairing or adding to the doctrines they had been taught.

Our text, to be fully understood, must be read in its whole connection. The Apostle is speaking of the coming perilous times, and of the seducers or cheats (*γόητες*),† who, after his death, shall wax worse and worse; not deceiving only, but being themselves deceived. And he points out, in the text, where his disciples may find safety: “Continue thou in the things which thou hast learned, and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; and that from a child (from infancy, *ἀπὸ βρέφους*) thou hast known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation.” And then follows, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” Immediately after comes the solemn charge, how Timothy, thus kept from error, is to exert himself: “I charge thee before God and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Now, first of all, one or two points must here be noted in explanation of the expressions here used. By “the man of God,” I suppose, St. Paul, here as elsewhere,‡ means, the teacher. The teacher has no more authority than the taught to seek his doctrine anywhere but in the old records of inspiration. And the teacher addressed is, in this instance, observe, one of the immediate successors, nay, a companion, of the Apostles. Again, when exhorted to continue in the things which he has learned, he is referred at once to the

* Revel. xxii. 18, 19.

† 2 Tim. iii. 13.

‡ 1 Tim. vi. 11.

written word: and this is the more remarkable, because, in speaking of those Scriptures, which Timothy (through the care of his Jewish mother) had known from infancy, St. Paul must mean the Old Testament. And I think we must allow the same Old Testament Scriptures to be principally alluded to also in the following verses, even though we translate with our version, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God," and thus employ the passage before us in conjunction with 2 Peter iii. 16 for establishing the inspiration of St. Paul's teaching, which is there classed with the elder *γραφαί*. Whether we adopt this interpretation as authorized by our version, or translate with others, "All Scripture given by inspiration is also profitable for doctrine," we must still, I think, hold, that it is the Old Testament which the Apostle has here especially in his mind, and of which he is speaking directly, when he goes on to say, that it is able to make the man of God perfect, thoroughly furnished unto every good work. But when, on the other hand, St. Paul refers Timothy, in the 14th verse, to his own instructions, he is speaking of what afterwards became the New Testament. When he refers to the then written word in the 15th verse, he means the Old Testament; when to the word spoken by himself and his brother Apostles, he means that divine preaching, of which the sole remains, we hold, as a matter of fact and history, are now preserved in the written records of the New.*

And now, keeping these preliminary points in mind, we proceed to consider what lessons may be learned from the text for ourselves.

Of the various difficulties which beset the path of the young

* See note at end of this Sermon.

student of theology at this time, there is scarcely any more serious than the following. He sees on every side of him men of the greatest learning, ability, zeal, and goodness, whose course is pointed out to him, no longer as an example, but as a warning. He is told that, whenever he diverges from the straight and narrow line of the received theology, there is danger lest he stumble on some pitfall, and be precipitated into error. On one side Romanism, on the other Rationalism, are the words of warning which call him to tread cautiously. Nay, he is almost afraid even to move straight-forwards, lest the path, on which he has been accustomed to walk from his childhood, may itself lead him to some dangerous quicksand, on which there is no sure standing; and he is tempted, not unnaturally, to sit down in despair. This must often be the trial of many an inquiring mind, in times of much controversy. Especially the young and inexperienced, who feel that the grave questions at issue require much learning and soundness of judgment, and holiness of life, to settle them—who are accustomed therefore, in ordinary times, to walk supported by the guiding hand of those whom they respect and honour—what are they to do in such times as these, when they hear such very different views of Christian truth advanced with equal earnestness by those who, if they did not uphold contradictory opinions, would naturally appear to be equally likely to have gained the truth?

One of two consequences will very probably follow: the young will either be driven prematurely to investigate and decide for themselves questions for which as yet they have not the requisite information and experience; or will sink into a very uncomfortable scepticism. As the tone of theology

around them varies so much, according to the society into which they are from time to time thrown, and they know that contradictory statements cannot be true, they are often glad to prevent themselves from thinking, rejoice to give up theology altogether, and will gladly take refuge in any other pursuit of literature or science which promises to divert their minds.

It is of course true, that there are certain plain Christian duties which present themselves to every serious person's conscience in the position in which God has placed him; and that the best advice which can be given generally to the young in present difficulties, is to occupy themselves with these. It is certain that God will make their path plain to them, and lead them on, by His Holy Spirit, through the discharge of these simple duties, if they wait on Him earnestly in prayer, to a more perfect and assured acquaintance with what is His real will. But I would speak now, not so much of ordinary Christians, as of those whose duty would seem to summon them to somewhat more of a scientific examination of things divine. Those especially who look forward to dedicating their manhood to the direct teaching of Christ's word, cannot, nor is it to be desired that they should, prevent themselves from looking forward, with longing anticipation, to that which is to be their life-long business. They know that practical and speculative divinity are indissolubly connected; and how are they ever to learn to be teachers of others, if they shun all thought of the subjects which they are to teach? It is impossible that the very youngest member of this University, who knows that in a few years he is to be called to provide for the spiritual wants of hundreds of souls—unless indeed he be wasting in thoughtlessness and sin

those precious years which the Lord gives him to prepare for his overpowering responsibilities—can fail to inquire often in these days where sound theology is to be found. Nay, no intelligent man whatsoever, who knows that in some sphere of domestic or public life his opinions must directly or indirectly affect and guide others, will be able to escape this inquiry. The answer to it is not easy; and the doubts and difficulties which gather round him will often make a man almost despair, as if truth were unattainable.

But even if, avoiding this temptation to mere scepticism or indifference, a man is forced to allow and feel that there is some great and important science of theology, no small difficulty and danger still await him lest he judge wrongly of its nature. If he is told continually, of the most intelligent and acute thinkers, whom he knows also to be men of deep piety, that they have fallen into some dangerous error, he will learn not unnaturally to conclude that it is their very ability which has misled them; and thus he will do injustice both to God's very precious gifts, and to the science which claims to be divine. If he believes that acute reasoning powers and a vivid imagination do but lead their possessors astray, when applied to the subject-matter of theology, he must concede to the scoffer, that whatever may be said of the practice of religion, its science seems to ally itself with dulness, if its sole office be to load the memory with the opinions of those who have spoken with authority, and, above all things, to avoid all vigorous or independent thought. But here would be grievous wrong to the noblest of all sciences, if the best powers of intellect were to be supposed to find their sole legitimate field for development in treating of things profane. She who was thus degraded to be but a

laborious drudge, could no longer be regarded as the queen and mistress of all sciences; and a total change would be needed in the whole theory of the studies of this place.

I propose then to show that the rule which St. Paul has set forth in our text, calling upon his disciples to remain firm in the received faith, amid the seductions of enticing novelties, has nothing in it that is at all akin to dulness—that in the field which is still left open, there is ample room for the full employment of every best faculty of the head as well as heart.

The Gospel is in one sense both old and new. That is true of the whole of it, which St. John applies especially to its great practical commandment. “Brethren, I write no new commandment unto you, but an old commandment which ye had from the beginning. Again, a new commandment I write unto you.”* Its truths and doctrines are very old, and yet possess an ever-springing freshness. For as when Christ came He revealed the God, who had been long known, in completely new relations, and enforced His commandments by new motives, so, even when He closed the revelation and exhibited the everlasting Gospel in its perfectness before the death of the last apostle, He endowed the holy books in which He caused it to be written, with a supernatural fruitfulness which proclaims their divine origin, causing them to unfold new stores of riches to the praying student every time he opens them, and giving them a power far above any contrivance of man’s wisdom to adapt their never-failing instructions to every new exigency in the history of the human race; so that to the end of time “every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of Heaven” must be, in the matter of what he teaches, as well

* 1 John ii. 7, 8.

as the form of his expressions, "like unto a man that is an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new," as well as "old."*

There is then one sense in which the Gospel admits of no novelty; another in which (as we have seen in a former discourse) it is ever fresh and varying.

But there are some very important distinctions which it will be necessary to take with us before we go further. It is granted that the Gospel is not so confined in its application to the mere letter and form of what is old, as to have lost its power of influencing men under a thousand changes, which, humanly speaking, in the time of the Apostles could never have been contemplated. He who knew all that was in men, and all that ever could be in them, intended His Gospel to be no unnatural system by which their best energies were to be stunted in their growth, while they were forced into a strange resemblance of outward look or stature; but He wished it to supply to all men the principle of life, which was to enable their many varied powers to be put forth vigorously in His service. Yet when the Gospel is called the "faith once (*i. e.*, once for all, *ἄπαξ*)† delivered unto the saints," and when, as in the text, we are exhorted to guard ourselves against unauthorized and dangerous novelties, by clinging close to the things which we have learned from the inspired Apostles and from the Old Testament, we are taught, above all, that the heavenly doctrines and principles of action to which we are to cling, are not so new in their adaptation to our varying circumstances as to admit of any real addition to the primal truth which Christ came into the world to unfold.

* Matthew xiii. 52.

† Jude 3.

Doubtless, He who inspired prophets and holy men of old when He was causing the Old Testament seers to preach, and their teaching to be recorded through many centuries, while the light, dim at first, was as yet shining more and more clearly unto the perfect day, but who afterwards sent forth the Apostles to proclaim, during the short space of only seventy years, that the sun was now fully risen, and that all the world might now rejoice in its unclouded light, might, if it had seemed good to His heavenly wisdom, have adopted another system. He might have inspired the fathers of the first four hundred years, or popes and councils, and a never-failing church, to develop the New Testament as the Apostles did the Old; but the proof of His having done so as a matter of fact is quite wanting, and no fancied analogy* can be adduced as evidence to outweigh well-attested historical facts. Where miracles are wanting, there we have no proof of inspiration, and without inspiration it is impious to add to God's word. The principle is the same applied to the whole word, which St. John laid down with reference to his prophecy and Moses to his law: "If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that

* For the way in which such fancied analogies have been employed, see Mr. Newman's 'Essay on Developments.' In pages 108-110, the gradual development of Christian doctrine, in the successive ages of the Church, is inferred from the case of God having first commissioned Moses to demand of Pharaoh that the people might go three days' journey into the wilderness to sacrifice, and afterwards sanctioned his extending (developing) the claim into a demand to go with the children, and flocks, and herds, a claim which finally developed itself into a complete departure from the country, never to return. The same theological principle is inferred from the children of Israel having at first undertaken to leave Sihon in possession of the country east of Jordan; and afterwards, on Sihon's refusal to let them pass, having "developed" this original offer into a conquest of his territory. Could the author be writing seriously when he advanced these analogies? What can those who venerate Butler say of such a parody of his argument?

are written in this book.”* “Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you.”† “What thing soever I command, observe to do it, thou shalt not add thereto.”‡ Or, as Solomon says more generally: “Every word of God is pure; add thou not unto His words, lest He reprove thee and thou be found a liar.”§ The principle is still the same: None may add to God’s word but those whom He has directly commissioned and inspired; and we dare not allow that any are endowed with this authority, unless, like St. Paul, they can point to the signs of their apostleship.

It is absolutely necessary for any sound system of theology, that a marked distinction be drawn between revealed truths and all which does not proceed thus directly and immediately from God.¶ For it is, as opposed to the old truths revealed, that all novelty must be error: where God on the contrary is silent, there He has not intended to prohibit man from seeking out the truth for himself. Men may differ in their judgments of what this directly revealed truth is. To some it may appear, and truly, that the Gospel is very simple; that it is all to be summed up in an enumeration of those few first principles, which are written in the Bible as with a sunbeam, of the truth of which, almost all experience shows, that every really humble and praying student will be convinced by God’s Holy Spirit from an earnest attention to the meaning of the sacred books. Others may have so accustomed themselves to refine away the plain meaning of

* Rev. xxii. 18.

† Deut. iv. 2.

‡ Deut. xii. 32.

§ Proverbs xxx. 5, 6.

¶ Thus the whole force of Mr. Newman’s Essay lay in a studious endeavour to keep this distinction out of sight. I believe that the book could have no weight with any except those whose ideas on the nature of revelation were confused, on the one hand by rationalistic, or on the other by Romanizing, teaching.

the sacred text, sitting down to the study of it more with the captious spirit of critics, than as anxious humbly to be taught, that they may miss its heavenly meaning, and reduce it to a mere repetition, from on high, of truths already acknowledged by uninspired philosophy. Others again, and those perhaps good and holy men, never turning to the word of life with full desire to ascertain its true meaning, but looking at it always through the medium of some human gloss, to which they have been accustomed from their childhood, may think that it contains and proves many things which God never intended should be found in it. All these, each to his own Master, at the Day of Judgment, must stand or fall. Thus varying in our estimates of what the primal revealed truth is, we may not too strongly blame, though we may strongly differ from each other. But this we are entitled and bound to require of all, who, either in theory or practice, would put forth a system of theology, that they treat nothing as a part of the Eternal Gospel, which they are not prepared, in life and in death, to maintain to be distinctly revealed from God. Otherwise they really degrade the majesty of divine truth, while they profess to elevate it. Every one knows that to see something miraculous in all the ordinary processes of nature, is much the same as to hold that there is no such thing as a miracle: and so also, to class all truths relating to religion as inspired is much the same as to affirm that there is no such thing as inspiration. He who would avoid a universal superstition, which is merely, after all, another name for a universal scepticism, must draw a marked distinction between statements which he holds to come directly from God's revelation, and those which he admits to be only human opinions, however true and

admirable ; as he must also distinguish between institutions believed to be directly ordained of God, and those which have sprung up and been developed merely by the sanction of His superintending providence, however useful and highly to be esteemed.

Now the revealed truths of the Gospel, as opposed to which all novelty must be falsehood, are either themselves the great principles or major premises, by the application of which the Christian's conduct is to be regulated, or they are facts of God's nature and man's, by which such principles are proved. And God's almighty wisdom has taken care that, with all their simplicity, these are abundantly sufficient for the regulation of our lives. Every truth then, be it principle or fact, which thus stands forth in the word of revelation, or, again, which may be inferred by strict and accurate logical sequence from a candid and enlarged comparison of all the Bible's statements, may fairly be considered an integral part of the eternal Gospel.

These are the old truths, in the belief of which, Timothy is warned to continue steadfast ; which are capable, indeed, of a thousand varying applications under varying circumstances, but which themselves ever remain certain and immutable ; to fall back upon our convictions of which is the great safeguard against novelty and error. With these, man's learning and ingenuity cannot, without danger, tamper. It will be wise for him to find some other field, on which directly to exercise his imagination or acuteness.

But indirectly, even these afford wide scope for the application of human learning and genius ; for there is a perpetual fund of never-failing interest in tracing their various combinations when applied to human conduct, and

the modes in which they find admittance, and take up their abode as living principles, by the Holy Spirit's assistance, within the thousand different hearts of men. Such secondary speculations on these subjects are, of course, no part of the primal Gospel truth, though so nearly occupied with its principles.

But, moreover, beyond the range of such truths altogether, there are many subjects of great interest for man, on which God has not thought fit supernaturally to instruct him; and these subjects, on which we have no revelation, are often so intimately connected with other points revealed, that passages occur in the Bible which may fairly be regarded as giving us slight hints to guide us in our thoughts of them, though it would be quite rash and illogical to say that on these obscure hints alone any certain conclusions can be built. Take, for example, the intermediate state of the soul between death and judgment. Doubtless, 1 Pet. iii. 19, and Rev. vi. 9, 10, 11, give some slight hints as to this state; but anything built on these hints must be merely human. Or, take again the particular mode in which the sacrament of the Lord's Supper is made available for the purifying of the soul. God has told us that the faithful soul communicating must receive a spiritual blessing; but as to the particular mode of blessing He is silent. Now, on this point, which Hooker* seems wisely to regard as, after all, one more of metaphysics than of religion, it has been thought that light may be gained from the few hints which the Bible contains as to the nature of Christ's glorified body; but any theory built on these is human merely.

* Eccl. Pol., book v. ch. lxviii.

Such matters as these are the great field of Rome's errors. Her teachers have taken (*e.g.*) that human theory on these two subjects which suits their own purposes; and, pointing to obscure hints in the Bible, as the foundations of their baseless superstructure, have attempted to force us to admire it as an integral portion of Christ's truth. But the error of the Romish Church in all this has lain, not in allowing theories to be constructed, but first, in constructing false theories, contradictory to other immutable principles of the Divine Word; and secondly, in claiming for these theories, which are false, an honour which would not have been due to them if true. On matters not forming part of revelation, men may speculate if they please in an humble spirit; but they can have no right to confound their own fallible opinions with God's unchanging truth.

Here then, as in the particular application of the general principles revealed, is a wide field for men's thoughts to exercise themselves with humility and reverence; not, perhaps, on such dark and subtle questions as we have now alluded to, but on those various other points where philosophy may well approach and illustrate the subject of religion: still the opinions or conclusions of human philosophy, however true, are not to be confounded with the Eternal Gospel which God alone reveals.

We may see then, I think, from these distinctions what the field is on which the Apostle will admit of no novelty. The Gospel is the same Gospel now, neither more nor less perfect than it was when St. John died; and it is in the immutable truths which the holy record of Apostolic teaching sets before us, that the text calls upon us to see that we remain steadfast. It is by testing all our human specula-

tions by these, that both churches and individual Christians learn to separate the chaff from the wheat, regarding all human teaching as part of the deceit against which St. Paul is warning us, if it shall be found by the humble inquirer, either in theory, or when carried out and developed in practice, to militate against these.

And now it will be seen also that the theological student need have no apprehensions lest, when thus summoned to follow the old beaten path, he must find his journey dull and devoid of all new incident, and giving no opportunity for the employment of his energies. To study God's word devotionally by the Holy Spirit's help, and meditate on the truths of religion for the direct benefit of our souls, is the highest employment of the highest element in man; but it is well, especially in such a place as this, that we should understand that in the province of theology the humble student will find full exercise also for the energies of his intellect.

It remains, then, to say a few words which may serve to suggest, with greater distinctness, how inexhaustibly rich is that field of study which still lies open to us. Of course, within narrow limits, nothing but a very vague sketch can be here attempted. Yet may even this, by God's blessing, be serviceable to the young, if, causing them to reflect on the great duty which the Lord Jesus Christ has laid upon them, to use all their best faculties of intellect as well as heart in his service, it shall stir up the zeal of any, more actively to use the many blessings provided in this much favoured place.

And here remark in passing, that this wide range of study goes far beyond the province of the mere professional theologian. Theology, in its highest sense, must be the noblest

study for man as man, since it leads him to the contemplation and fuller knowledge of the Divine nature in its creating, sustaining, redeeming, and sanctifying powers; penetrates also into the deep secrets of the human heart; and is, besides, indissolubly connected with both the outward and inward history of those great Societies, which, being the selected depositories of heavenly truth, have, both in their faithfulness to this great trust, and their neglect of it, so deeply affected the destinies of our race.

It is, in fact, the most distinguishing characteristic of the system of this University, that it considers theology not merely as the professional study of the clergy, but, closely connected, as it is, with the only true philosophy, as the great master-science, standing to us in the same relation in which their philosophy stood to the Greeks—apart from which there may, indeed, be a disjointed communication of knowledge on particular subjects, but no education of the whole man. And those who would have our system in this respect altered, scarcely appreciate the true nature of the divine science they are speaking of, or seriously contemplate the fact, that, in all ages, its truths have been the great motives which have swayed men, and thus hastened or retarded the rise and fall of nations. When they would confine theological instruction to the clergy, these persons must be dreaming of some useless commonplace book filled with the names of forgotten heresies and the technical jargon of the schools, and can have no thought of the true divine philosophy: for those who know most of the nature and the workings of God and of man, with power to use this knowledge, must ever be the real guides of a nation's thought, and must therefore give its chief direc-

tion both to a nation's will, and to the events that spring from it. Such men do really control that flood which the mere politician can never stem, but which he deems it his highest wisdom to moderate, while he clears the obstacles that oppose its course. Who doubts that it is, not indeed the clergy, but, in Coleridge's phrase, the cleresy—by which, I suppose, he means the great body of those especially who know most of the science of human nature and have the power to wield it—that must ever be the real controllers of their fellow-men?

It was their exclusive possession even of a very imperfect form of this science, which, in the more barbarous ages, chiefly gave to the clergy a power such as no physical force of kings or conquerors could control. The world seeks to train men to such knowledge on false and ungodly principles. To raise them to a pure and holy form of it, and thus endow them with a practical wisdom which the world's philosophy vainly strives to imitate, and before which it falls powerless, is the grand object of divine philosophy, that is theology, in its fullest and truest sense. It cannot be of such a science as this that the objectors are speaking, or they would never wish to shut up the most powerful of all kinds of knowledge within the circle of a priestly caste. Yet such is the real nature of that theology, to which, however we may fail miserably in practice, the whole theory of our education calls upon us to guide the young. Such knowledge has obviously its deep interest for men of every class.

It is not unusual to consider theology as divided into speculative and practical—the one the province of the student, the other that of the professional pastor, or of every one who exerts himself in any pastoral relation amongst his

fellow-men. Great exception may justly be taken against such a division, which seems at first sight to imply that it is possible for a man to form right opinions on religion without a zealous practice of them, or to practise its precepts to any real efficient purpose in guiding others, without some system as his rule. It must, of course, be granted, that a holy life is the great indispensable requisite for the formation by the Holy Spirit's help of correct views of divine truth; and that, as all theories of religion formed in solitude must be tested by their applicability in the market-place, so, on the other hand, he who is perpetually occupied in instructing his fellows publicly in the resorts of men, must every day strive to gain guidance and new life by retiring within himself, not for devotion only, but for study. The division, therefore, is not one which it is safe to encourage too much in actual practice. It may, however, be suitable enough for assisting us to understand, with logical precision, the various subdivisions of our great science. Each branch of theological study must be subdivided according as we propose to view it on its speculative or its practical side.

“What,” says South,* “is divinity but a doctrine treating of the nature, attributes, and works of the great God, as He stands related to rational creatures; and the way how rational creatures may serve, worship, and enjoy Him? And if so, is not the subject-matter of it the greatest, and the design and business of it the noblest, in the world? It has been disputed,” he continues, “to which of the intellectual habits mentioned by Aristotle it most properly belongs, some referring it to wisdom, some to science, some to prudence,

* Sermons, vol. iii. p. 31. Oxford, 8vo., 1823.

and some compounding it of several of them together ; but those seem to speak most to the purpose, who will not have it formally any one of them, but virtually, and in an eminent transcendent manner, all. And now can we think," he says, "that a doctrine of that depth, that height, and that vast compass, grasping within it all the perfections and dimensions of human science, does not worthily claim all the preparations whereby the wit and industry of man can fit him for it? All other sciences are accounted but handmaids to divinity." And this, I think, will be allowed to be no over-charged picture drawn by the professed theologian enamoured of his own pursuit, if we regard the science in all the breadth and fulness to which it swells when regarded as the enlightener and guide of human nature. Its sphere of study must be boundless, as its practical duties are inexhaustible.

In order to see the great extent of its range we might dwell first on the way in which this divine science may be used to hallow those branches of learning which are merely preparatory and subsidiary to it. God has willed (*e. g.*) that the study of languages shall be necessary as the first step to enable us to feel any confidence in our attempts to understand the documents on which it is all built. And here in sacred philology is more than enough to occupy the labours of the longest and most energetic life. And when the way has been thus cleared, and we can understand the meaning of the words which are to be the ground of our foundation, think still how all the other preparatory studies of a liberal education seem each to fall into its own place as indispensable, before we can either ourselves add to the superstructure or even learn to appreciate or comprehend the labours of our predecessors. To confine ourselves still to the foundation—take any one

portion of the Bible, even after the ordinary difficulties of its language have been surmounted, who shall be able without such instruction to approach to a solution of its many critical questions, to form to himself a vivid conception of its historical and biographical sketches, or descend into its deep mines of philosophic thought? Nor, when we leave the mere foundation, can we have any difficulty in seeing how, as we go further, our ordinary human learning must, by the blessing of Christ's Spirit, aid us in a science which, above all others, requires acute and practised powers of reasoning to detect fallacies, imagination and poetic feeling to soar to its empyrean heights, and practical sound sense and an acquaintance with the facts of history, to enable us to test its lofty theories by their effects on the lives of men.

As all human learning does to the faithful Christian's ear, even in his earliest studies, echo the voice divine, so will the remembrance of it enable him the better to understand these heavenly accents when he is giving himself up entirely to dwell upon their sound. The very faults and ignorance of his heathen teachers (noble even in their fallen state) help him the better to appreciate that truth which they were vainly feeling after. Who sees not a heaven-taught Plato in the holy John; a Stoic not of this earth in the enduring Paul; who ever allows himself to speculate on the state of the souls in prison without thinking how poet and philosopher of the old times has wandered over the same ground before him; and who can read the ninth chapter of the Romans without rejoicing that his own soul's eternal destiny depends on the resolves of his beneficent Creator and the Lord Jesus Christ, not on the iron laws of a remorseless fate which sways even God and all the universe; or who

reads the account of the wretched state of the lost heathen world in the first chapter of the same Epistle, without reverting in thought to the poet or the historian who tells us of the rock of Capri and the miserable old man who made it infamous by his lusts? Here are one or two out of innumerable instances of the intimate connection of our common preparatory studies with things divine.

Again, when the theologian enters more directly on the distinctly practical portion of his labours, what writer of biography, what sweet singer in our own or any other tongue, who has laid open the secrets of the human heart and gained an undying fame because his descriptions are true to nature, can be useless to him whose pastoral office it is to understand man's wants and the mode of their supply, to listen to the murmurs of the craving human soul, and give the food which God in Christ has ordained should satisfy it? What grave disquisition on the theory of the passions, or historical exemplification of the mode in which they work, can be useless to him who, while he treats of God and things divine, thinks of these ever in their relation to man, and cannot fully understand them unless he has mastered the science of man?

It would be vain to attempt to enter here on another field—the way in which the skilful pastor, bent on his Master's service, will endeavour to make his human learning the source from which he draws an innocent relaxation for his people, that by Christ's help he may thus wean them from low pursuits, using the lecture-room or school-house, as the week-day assistant to his labours in the Church. It would be vain also to attempt to do more than hint that our Lord's own example throughout the whole Gospels, as well

as distinctly in the 13th chapter of St. Matthew, shows how we must avail ourselves, in teaching, of all human helps to give interest to the new forms in which we set forth old truths.

Passing by all these, remember, in conclusion, that theology has departments of study distinctly and peculiarly its own, which are almost boundless. These it would be useless now to attempt even to enumerate. Observe only, that so little are we in the habit of realising this thought, and so much ground of theological study remains still untouched amongst us, with all our vaunted lore, that the very names of many of these cannot easily be expressed in our tongue. Where amongst us, *e. g.*, is to be found the systematic history of opinions in the Church, marking their development and corruption, and the various causes in history or philosophy that have called them forth at first into prominence, or caused them to be abused? And without such works how shall we expect to train the polemic to resist error, the most profitless certainly of theologians, but still indispensable in his sphere, so long as the revolving wheel, and the recurrence of the same causes, are sure to bring back old errors, though masked under new names?

Or, to take one more example. We are a great missionary country, and profess to be anxious, under God's blessing, at this time to provide more distinctly systematic instruction for the missionaries we would train. But how is the missionary to be well armed to go forth in his Redeemer's service, to combat with the many subtle forms of error which, in the great empires of the East, *e. g.*, are supported by the reverence and accumulated learning of hundreds of years,

if he has not studied the history and doctrines of false religions as well as of the true, seen the relations in which these doctrines stand to Christianity, and learned to know at once their weakness and their strength?

Indeed the field is boundless. The student ought to be under no temptation to think that he must stray into dangerous novelties in search of subjects which are to interest him. The danger is not the poverty of our science, but lest we be blinded and confused and unable to make any choice amid the superabundance of its riches. It is necessary to warn each one who would make real progress in theology, that he must select his sphere and labour in it zealously.

It only remains to call to mind last of all, what danger there is when we thus speak of the science of religion, lest, however much we strive to avoid it, we may fall into the great sin of regarding the whole too much as a matter of speculation and intellect. Yet "God hath chosen the foolish things of this world to confound the wise;"* and many an uninstructed peasant, by the blessing of Divine grace, has a far deeper and truer knowledge of God, and Christ, and things divine, and his own soul, than the most learned and acute theologian. Let us then all receive this solemn lesson: that, above all his other labours and exertions, there is a great work laid on the student, from the fact that no man can be a truly great theologian who is not, by the Holy Spirit's aid, endued with personal holiness. The principle is as true as the Gospel, that no one can understand the word of God who is not himself a child of God: hence the regulations of our colleges have wisely provided that these houses of learning

* 1 Cor. i. 27.

shall be also houses of prayer. Here is after all the great work—to make personal progress, by the Holy Spirit's help, in the Christian life. And the holiness required must be no poor compromise between conscience and worldliness, but something which shall really resemble what it is called, the imitation of Christ crucified. This work no outward circumstances, no failure of health, or leisure, or other means, can interrupt: a thousand things may prevent us, however willing, from making progress as students; but this work is indispensable for us as beings with immortal souls.

NOTE.—p. 97.

I have dwelt on this point because persons often argue as if the concession that St. Paul (in the words *ἐπὶ γράμματα* and *πᾶσα γραφή*) is here speaking of the Old Testament, would entirely destroy the applicability of this passage to be used in proof of the all-sufficiency of God's written word. It is often urged that verses 16 and 17, as thus used by Protestants, prove too much: if they prove the all-sufficiency of Scripture at all, they will prove, it is said, the all-sufficiency of the Old Testament to the exclusion of the New. To this it is answered, that the Apostle is to be understood as saying directly, in verse 16, that even the Old Testament, properly understood, might furnish the man of God thoroughly: just as St. John says of the contents of his Gospel, that they are sufficient to secure eternal life for those who believe in them; but neither Apostle means to imply any exclusion of a future more full explanation of the word of life by other *inspired* teachers. What I understand St. Paul to be here insisting on is this, that the only security against error will be found by turning to *inspired* teachers—to the Old Testament and the inspired teaching of the Apostles of the New. It is not simply because it is *written* that we uphold the authority of the Scripture against tradition, but because, being written, it is as a matter of fact the only existing record of inspired teaching. The true Protestant principle is the absolute necessity of tracing

all those statements of doctrine to which we bow with implicit reverence to an inspired source, and the impossibility of so tracing any statements but those of Holy Scripture. And from this follows, as a natural inference, the all-sufficiency of Holy Scripture; for as a matter of fact and history, God has given us no other inspired guide, and we trust His merciful and fatherly care of us not to have given us an insufficient guide.

This statement of the Protestant principle will show at once how fallacious it is to say that Protestants must go to tradition for their own doctrine of the all-sufficiency of Scripture. We hold Scripture to be all-sufficient, not on the authoritative decision of any Fathers or of the whole Church, but because, as a matter of fact and history, it is known to be the only sure record of inspired teaching.

GOSPEL FACTS AND DOCTRINES.

1846.

I AM induced to add two very short Sermons to this series, as connected in subject with the apprehensions I have expressed, lest an insidious form of infidelity may, before we are aware of it, gain ground in this country. It is maintained by some that a marked tendency exists at present in reflecting minds to diverge into one or other of two extreme views, one of which passes necessarily into Romanism, while the other regards all Christian doctrine as a matter of complete indifference, teaching, that, provided a man rejects the decision of an infallible guide, he may unite with those who entertain any belief, however erroneous, if only they will profess a willingness to be led by Christ's example, and to act in His spirit. A confident hope seems to be entertained in some quarters, especially, I believe, amongst persons of the Unitarian school, that, as the logical faculty is more exercised, Christendom will resolve itself into two churches, one professing to be infallible, the doctrines of which are fixed and promulgated by one irresistible authority, the other embracing all varieties of speculative opinion on Christian doctrine ; in a word, including all who can "*ex animo* repeat the Lord's Prayer," the only formula, it has been stated, to which the adhesion of Christians can rightfully be demanded.

I will not stop to ask why a (so-called) Church which is to be thus comprehensive, should confine itself at last by adopting a confession of belief in dogmas concealed under the form of a prayer. I would rather most solemnly protest against the statement, that inquiry conducted in a reverent spirit is likely to lead to any such result. Protestantism is rightly a distinct and definite system, teaching indeed that the number of doctrines necessary to salvation is few, and that these doctrines, as living

principles of action, may be held by many who cannot express them accurately in words, or who may choose other words than those to which we are accustomed, in which to clothe their belief in the truths we love, but duly upholding the majesty and paramount importance of right Christian principles, which it considers as but another name for right Christian doctrines.

That sort of pseudo-Protestantism which is thus erroneously held up to admiration as the only true antagonist of Romanism, must, I believe, at last, however little its advocates may wish such a result, end in spreading what is nothing better than a very insidious form of infidelity. If it has no rallying-point but the Christian name, we must remember that that name is happily in the present day too much held in honour to allow even infidels to dispense with it. Men may be found who call themselves Christians, who look upon the Gospel as a mere aggregate of unauthoritative legends, and its history as only valuable when regarded as the mythical exposition of certain philosophic truths to which the mind can attain without the aid of revelation.* It would indeed be a miserable prospect if there were no alternative but an unconditional surrender of our reason to the crushing tyranny of Rome, or embarking on this shoreless sea of indifferentism. But God will defend his Church; and the sure and positive Gospel truth which has triumphed through so many ages will not be lost now. As it is sometimes implied, in reference to this subject, that Dr. Arnold favoured such a view of the unimportance of correct belief, I think it right to record my conviction, that had that great man been now living he would have been in many ways admirably suited to destroy this most mistaken system. Few men who ever lived have had a more ardent faith in those doctrines which he deemed essential, or have more clearly understood and illustrated how Christian doctrine, if really believed, must affect practice. Any one who reads his sermons, or follows the record of his daily life, must see that his whole soul would have revolted from a Christianity which was to teach no positive Christian truth.

* For a clear exposition of such errors, see Trench's Notes on the Miracles, Preliminary Essay, ch. v.

I.—GOSPEL FACTS.

ACTS x. 39.

“ We are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem : whom they slew and hanged on a tree.”

THESE words call our attention to a very important characteristic of the teaching of the Apostles. The passage from which the words come is a short summary of Christianity, given by St. Peter to Cornelius and his company. There are others of the same kind in the sacred narrative, and they bear, in many respects, a remarkable resemblance to what we call the Apostles' Creed ; giving us thereby a clear proof, that, whatever may be the real history of that Creed as a distinct formulary, it is well entitled to the name Apostolic, from its being so very much a copy in substance, and sometimes even in language, of these statements of the Apostles.

One of the most remarkable features in which the Apostles' Creed resembles these summaries given us by inspired men, is the way in which it dwells on certain plain historical facts, and represents the belief in them to be a necessary part of Christian faith. It has been remarked, that this important peculiarity accounts for the introduction of the name of Pontius Pilate into the Apostles' Creed. We say, “ Crucified under Pontius Pilate,” to mark the date and locality of our Lord's crucifixion, and consequently the historical character of our faith ; to record that we are not contented with any transcendental theory of a victory over the powers of evil,

won by the Son of God in the human soul; but that we believe in our Lord's birth, life, death, and resurrection literally and historically as facts. The form of some of those strange mystical errors, which, springing from the metaphysical subtleties of the Eastern mind, vexed the Church in very early times, makes it probable that this historical allusion was introduced into the Creed for the very purpose here mentioned. Certain it is that similar errors of a mystical transcendentalism have appeared again in other countries in the present day, and seem not unlikely, in time, to corrupt the simplicity of the faith even in our own Church. Against all such subtle refinements of scepticism the Apostles' Creed contains a plain protest, warning us that he who does not believe historically is no Christian in the sense of St. Peter or St. Paul: nay, it would seem to be against the maintainers of such errors that St. John * is warning us, when he tells us, of him who denies that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, "that he is a deceiver and an antichrist."

In fact, every student of the New Testament must come to one of two conclusions, however he may try to conceal from himself the alternative; either that Christianity is no religion at all as distinguishable from simple Deism, and that its sacred books are a mere cheat; or that it demands an assent to a number of distinct historical statements which it considers the basis of all its teaching, and without which it would be nothing but a name. The plain historical character of the faith which we are required to have in our Lord's life and death and resurrection, is shown, as in a thousand other places, so also in our text. The apostle speaks as a witness attesting facts. "We are witnesses of all things which He

* Second Epistle. Cf. verses 7, 9, 10.

did, both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem, whom they slew and hanged on a tree. Him God raised up and showed him openly unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead."

Now why, it may be asked, do I insist on this in addressing you? * The danger amongst us surely is, not lest any of you should refine away your belief in the facts of Christianity into a mere airy subtlety, which is the most insidious form of infidelity, because it has an appearance both of philosophy and of religion in it; but lest, while you fully acknowledge the facts of the Gospel as history, they have no influence on your lives. Such warning, it might be urged, may be needful enough for men in the maturity of their education, especially for men of speculative minds, but why force it upon you? The answer is distinct. It is our business, as Christ's ministers, training the young in this place, not to look merely to those boyish errors, the temptations to which immediately surround you, but to endeavour, by God's help, to store your minds with thoughts which, through His Spirit, may keep you safe in the shock of the conflicts of life. Against all bad principles, whether of unsound theology or loose morality, forewarned is forearmed. One of the greatest attractions of error is generally its novelty. It will fall powerless on the man who has known how its sophistry may be detected from his boyhood.

There is, however, another plain and more immediate reason why this subject should present itself to us now. The holy season on which we have this day entered is a more than usually solemn and distinct commemoration of historical

* Preached at Rugby.

facts. When we call to mind this week * the testimony of the Apostles as to the various stages of the Lord's passion, it will be well that we should consider how truly a belief in these facts is the basis and foundation of our faith.

This demand which Christianity makes on our assent to facts of history is a very important point of distinction between it and what is called the religion of nature. At first sight, we might be inclined to suppose, that, if certain great principles of morality and religion be admitted, the historical element of our faith must be comparatively unimportant. But all experience shows that this is not so, and a little reflection will convince us, that reason would itself suggest what experience thus confirms. The whole scheme of Christian doctrine turns upon facts; for the atonement which has been made for the sins of lost man by the Lord Jesus Christ, was accomplished by His birth on earth, as followed by His suffering life, death, and resurrection. He who does not believe in these, cannot be, in our sense of the word, a Christian; neither can he know those motives of deep reverence, gratitude, and love, by which Christian faith is made operative. If we were to select one point as the most distinguishing characteristic of a truly Christian heart, it would be the feeling of a real and ardent reverential attachment to the person of our Saviour. But how can this feeling exist in the heart without an acknowledgment of the facts of His history? We must know what He has done for us. We must see in Him one who, first, being the Eternal Son of God, has left Heaven, and endured for us the worst sufferings of our mortal nature; and secondly, who has returned to His kingdom in Heaven, where He ever lives to make intercession for us.

* Preached on Palm Sunday.

Without the first fact, which is indissolubly connected with the history of His passion, the claim upon our gratitude is lessened infinitely; without the second, which depends on the history of His ascension, our gratitude must be cold, and cannot ripen into love, for we cannot recognise Him as our ever-present friend.

Here, then, is enough to show us how the historical facts of Christianity differ from those of common ordinary history, in that they are the sources of the purest Christian feeling. The sparks of holy feeling and of holy living will lie dormant in the soul till these facts strike upon it, and call forth its hidden warmth and light. And he whose heart is really humble and faithful will, by the help of God's Spirit, embrace the facts of Christianity when presented to him, for he will find in them, when really apprehended, the satisfaction of those longings of his spiritual nature which were never before able to find their proper vent. He that is of God heareth God's word; and the heart that longs for a Saviour rejoices when it finds him revealed historically in the Gospel. A Christianity, then, without the facts of Christian history, is not only a system quite unknown to the Apostles and first preachers of the Gospel, but has also lost the motives by which they stirred men's hearts.

Brethren, we shall meet together in the mornings this week to have the historical facts of our Lord's passion vividly represented to us before we enter on the business of each day. For those who try to realize these truths, this week is indeed the holiest in all the year; and we are to mark the close of it by joining in the holiest Christian ordinance. It may well be said that this week must be a marked stage in the Christian life of every one of us. We cannot be brought

into that intimate proximity with our Lord and His sufferings which this time with its services implies—we cannot hear the summons of this morning to prepare for the Lord's table, and the further exhortations to the same purpose, which I suppose will be addressed to each of you in your several houses this evening, without being in some marked degree either better or worse. These things, intended by God's Spirit to stir our hearts to a deeper sense of sin, and a deeper feeling of gratitude to Him who will save us from it, must either be a savour of life unto life, or, if neglected, of death. Would that we could all of us, as we follow the spectacle of this week, think how deeply we are ourselves concerned in its history; thus would every smallest sin of unkindness, evil temper, indolence, self-sufficiency, or self-indulgence, appear indeed a thing to be hated by us, when we see that it could not be atoned for without the death of Christ.

II.—GOSPEL DOCTRINES.

PHILIPPIANS ii. 6-8.

“Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God :

“But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men :

“And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.”

THIS remarkable passage was read in the Epistle for last Sunday, having been evidently selected as well suited to prepare our minds for the solemnities of this day.*

You are aware that there has been considerable controversy as to the interpretation of it, and especially that the translation, “thought it not robbery to be equal with God,” has been objected to. I am not going now to enter on the controversy ; I shall only state my opinion, that the point in dispute is one of comparatively little moment. The rival interpretations of the words *οὐχ ἀρπαγμὸν ἡγήσατο*, are that of our version, “thought it not robbery to be equal with God,” and that which the Unitarian writers especially, though not exclusively, prefer, “thought it not a thing to be grasped at that he should be equal with God.”

These, at first sight, appear very different ; but I repeat that the point in dispute is one of little moment, for, whichever way the words are taken, the same doctrine must be inferred from them. As to our version, there is no mis-

* Preached on Good Friday.

taking its declaration of the Godhead of Christ; "he thought it not robbery to be equal with God:" and if we grant, for argument's sake, the propriety of the other translation, "thought it not a thing to be grasped at that he should be equal with God," the same doctrine still follows necessarily by inference. For observe the context. The Apostle is inculcating a lesson of humility from Christ's example: but what humility could there be in a creature not grasping at equality with his Creator? The Being therefore who taught us a lesson of humility by not grasping at an equality with God must be himself divine. The doctrine then remains unaltered, whichever of the two interpretations is preferred. In the first, it is clearly and directly stated: from the second, it follows by necessary inference if the passage is to have any meaning. The words remind us then, taken either way, that the Being whose death on earth we are met to commemorate is Divine, and hence its suitableness to direct our thoughts to-day.

We had occasion to observe, last Sunday, that any true belief in the doctrines of Christianity, implies a belief also in its record of historical facts. It is very important to remark that the converse is true also: that the facts of the Christian history are dead and powerless unless accompanied by its doctrines. There is often great confusion on this subject. Men speak of Christian doctrines as if they were mere intellectual propositions, mere statements of speculative opinion, without influence upon life and conduct. Such statements have, it is true, sometimes, perhaps often, been intruded into schemes of Christian doctrine; and the great majority of worldly men will hold even the holiest truths which ought to affect the heart in this cold intellectual way. But the true

Christian doctrines, rightly held, are living principles of action, inseparable from our conduct, and give their whole tone and complexion to our thoughts and lives.

The acutest of philosophers has analysed that process of reasoning which attends on or precedes all human conduct; and from his analysis it may be shown that the mind is always swayed in action by the presence of a doctrine.* No man ever acts without a reason of some kind, *i.e.*, without a motive; that is, in other words, without a doctrine, whether it be good or bad. For by the term doctrine, we mean the systematic statement of the principles of religion, and principles of religion are principles of conduct.† To say, then, generally, that the doctrines to which a man assents are of no importance, and that his conduct may be right without doctrines, is to maintain a contradiction in terms; for conduct is only called right because it proceeds from right motives, and right motive is merely another name for right doctrine.

But, probably, no one means to deny this, however vaguely he may express himself. What objectors, urging that doctrines are unimportant, mean, is, probably, that, though of course some doctrines (as those of natural religion) are influential on conduct, those of Christianity are not such. Men, they say, may be all united in heart and sentiment, if they believe the plain outward facts of the Christian history, without troubling themselves as to its doctrines. This would be very strange: the mere dead facts without the

* Aristotle Eth. N. B. VI. ch. xii. § 20. Oxford, 1828.

† It is not, of course, denied that what is essentially the same doctrine may be expressed in more than one form of words. It is the deep importance of the essence, not of the form, that is here contended for. The form has its value as the case which is to preserve the essence.

doctrines, cannot be principles of action : nay, they can have no influence on our conduct.

The mistake all through is obvious. The facts of the Gospel history, as they are themselves the sure means of eliciting the peculiar doctrines which our Lord revealed, in their turn can only be appreciated in their full proper significancy, when meditated on and viewed in all their various bearings by the light which is shed on them from the doctrines they have illustrated and proved. We have both a historical and a doctrinal Christianity, and each in truth is essential for the other ; neither can be fully understood or appreciated if they stand apart. Just as the New Testament would be imperfect if it did not contain both the Epistles and the doctrinal discourses of our Lord on the one hand ; and the plain historical narratives, the Gospels, and the Acts, on the other.

Christianity without the basis of the historical facts of our Lord's birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension, must be a mere system of Deism ; and these facts themselves would be only more strange, not more divine, than those of any ordinary history, if they did not become to every faithful mind the illustration and proof of certain great Christian doctrines, which spring forth from them to be the directors of the faithful Christian's life. Without such doctrine as that of the text, there would be little in the history of the Lord's birth more than in that of Samuel—in His death, more than in that of Jeremiah—in His resurrection, more than in that of Lazarus—in His ascension, more than in the taking up into Heaven of Enoch and Elijah. But all things that are most wonderful in the various histories of the most chosen sons of men meet in Him, and illustrate the doctrine

that He is the Eternal Son of God: and this doctrine presents His earthly history to us, as we read and dwell upon it, in a totally different aspect.

The general statement of this matter has too long delayed us from applying it to the especial subject of this day. The text sets before us that great doctrine which gives to the spectacle of this day its awful solemnity, and makes the events which were witnessed upon Calvary the crisis of the world's fate. Our Lord's whole life, conduct, and sayings, had been an illustration of this great doctrine of His divinity; and, on the other hand, it is only when viewed by the light of this doctrine that His crucifixion can be appreciated as the sacrifice for the sin of man; while again, it is when so viewed that His crucifixion assumes its proper place as the director of our lives. He who hung upon the cross this day was the same Eternal Being who had been employed by His Father to create the universe, and was destined to be at last the Judge of all; and who, at the time when He submitted to be thus rejected by His creatures, could have swept the earth and all its inhabitants into annihilation by a word.

To say nothing of the enemies who caused the Lord's death, it will be granted, I suppose, that the Jews and Roman soldiers who stood looking on, could not understand or make a good use of the event they witnessed, for want of any right doctrinal knowledge of who or what He was: It will be granted that even the Centurion's declaration only showed a good beginning of faith, which wanted further knowledge to make it really operative and acceptable: It will be granted that even the Apostles and the Virgin Mother could not at all really understand the mysterious scene, and appreciate its ineffable moment for the race of men, till from the Lord's

resurrection and ascension, and the fulfilment of His promise to send the Comforter, they had learned the doctrine that He was indeed their God.

It is then from the doctrine of the text that the history of this day gains its deep significancy: and thus explained, it becomes at once necessarily the turning point of the whole Christian life. It has been truly said that "the great and awful doctrine of the Cross of Christ (*i.e.* of His death interpreted by the belief in His divine nature), may be fitly called the heart of religion. The heart is the seat of life—it is the principle of motion, heat, and activity—from it the blood goes to and fro to the extreme parts of the body—it sustains the man in his powers and faculties—it enables the brain to think, and when it is touched man dies: and in like manner the sacred doctrine of Christ's atoning sacrifice is the vital principle on which the Christian lives," and without which the Christian's faith dies.*

Hence it is that from the event of this day Christianity has gained its usual name—the Religion of the Cross. The Cross has become its universal symbol. This day's history rightly understood, and the thoughts that spring from it, search the human heart, and stir it from its depths.

Brethren, let us endeavour in all our lives to show that we are influenced by it. Deep humility—a deep sense of sin—deep gratitude to the Divine Being who suffered and died as man to save us from sin—a gradually deepening love of Him, and trust in His mercy, and desire to hold communion with Him—these are the necessary results which, by the Holy Spirit's aid, must flow from contemplating the history of the Lord's death by the light of the doctrine of His

* Newman's Sermons, vol. vi., Sermon 7.

divinity. And in conclusion, think not that any of us can become the subjects and recipients of such feelings, without showing that they have taken possession of us in our whole conduct. Young and old we all fall prostrate this day at our Saviour's cross, outwardly. If we do so in heart, we shall hate and flee from sin, and gladly seek on Easter-Morning to gain strengthening aid from the same Saviour in His ordinance, that we may rise with Him to a new life of holiness.

FURTHER SUGGESTIONS.

1861.

I.—THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD.

1 COR. i. 21.

“ After that, in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.”

ALL through this passage St. Paul contrasts the wisdom of God and the wisdom of the world. To the wisdom of the world the Gospel of Jesus Christ appears foolishness. The Apostle says (v. 17) that he had preached the Gospel in Corinth, “not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect.” “The preaching of the Cross,” he says (v. 18), “is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved,” he goes on, “it is the power of God.” Again (v. 23), “We preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling-block, and unto the Greeks foolishness, but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.” And in the next chapter we have the same strain continued—as (v. 4), “My speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power. That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. Howbeit we speak wisdom

among them that are perfect, yet not the wisdom of this world."

In illustration of St. Paul's meaning in thus writing to the Corinthians, it has been said *—"The same simplicity of teaching which was a rebuke to the superstitious cravings of the Oriental and the Jew (*i.e.* in St. Paul's time), was also a rebuke to the intellectual demands of the European Greek. What outward miracles were to them (the Jews), a theory, a system, a philosophy, were to their heathen neighbours. The same subtlety of discussion which had appeared already in the numerous schools into which Greek philosophy was broken, and which appeared afterwards in the theological speculations of the fourth and fifth centuries, needed not now, as in the time of Socrates, to be put down by a truer philosophy, but by something which should give them fact instead of speculation—flesh and blood instead of words and theories. Such a new starting-point was provided by the *Apostle's constant representation of the simple but startling event which had taken place within their own generation in Judæa—the crucifixion of his Master. Its outward form was familiar to them wherever the Roman law had been carried out against the slaves and insurgents of the East. It was for them now to discover its inward application to themselves."

There can be no doubt that in all ages since St. Paul's day the same tendency has shown itself which is here ascribed to the intellectually active Greeks. It is chiefly found amongst highly educated men of speculative minds, but is not confined to them. It shows itself in a desire to treat the Gospel rather as a system of philosophy than as a simple message

* Vide Stanley in loc., St. Paul's Epistles to the Corinthians.

respecting their souls, sent from God to the dullest and most ignorant of men as well as to the refined.

A somewhat similar tendency is a stumbling-block in the way of all persons who set themselves down, as every man who has sufficient leisure and information ought, to study the Bible, not merely for the sake of having well-known Gospel-truths brought back into his thoughts, but that he may examine, so far as he can, the scope, argument, and history of each particular book. As a case in point, consider how those who give or receive what is called, often very inappropriately, religious instruction in our schools will always be in danger of fixing their attention on matters of mere intellectual knowledge connected with religious truth, rather than on those life-giving truths themselves which constitute Christ's Gospel. Let all who study such matters for themselves, and all who teach or learn them in our schools, be ready at once to face this difficulty. To go through the history of the Jewish kings, or even of the prophets and the patriarchs, is no more in itself a religious exercise than to learn the history of England. To trace the ancient geography of the Holy Land and the journeys of St. Paul has in itself nothing more to do with religion than to trace the same geography in modern times or follow the wanderings of the Crusaders. So also to read the riddle of a very difficult prophecy, or clearly unfold one of St. Paul's intricate arguments in the Epistles, is very often nothing more than a purely intellectual effort. All these things ought to be done so far as we can do them ; but they must be sanctified by a devotional spirit before they can be of any real benefit to our souls or have a claim to be looked upon as having any direct connexion with religion. Let all of us, in reading the Bible thus intellectually in our

own private reading, and in teaching our own children, or in our Sunday Schools, be very careful to remember that intellectual knowledge about religious truth will be of no benefit unless the real religious truth itself, by the help of the Holy Spirit, takes possession of our hearts.

When we consider what a variety of styles of writing there is in the many books which make up the one volume which we call the book, the Bible—how difficult to explain are many passages in all these books—so difficult that the longest life of the ablest and most learned Divine will certainly not suffice to solve one-half of the questions they raise—we are sometimes apt to forget for a moment how it is that this book is capable of being used as the manual of religious instruction for the poorest and most ignorant of mankind. Nay, what says St. Paul in the 26th and 27th verses of the chapter before us? “Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called, but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise.” How is this, if the books which teach the Gospel have so much in them that is hard?

Now, there is more than one answer to this question, and all the answers are worthy of attention.

First—looking upon these books merely as on any common human books, what is it that gives them, even in this light, their great value? Amongst mere human books, what is the chief characteristic of those which are in every man’s hands, which have lasted for centuries, and been esteemed as full of wisdom by men of many generations and many countries? As a general rule, their great attraction is not to be found in those passages which are very difficult, nor usually in any lengthened and intricate arguments they may contain, but in

such separate maxims of wisdom, or well-expressed announcements of true common feeling, as are from their very form easily apprehended by all readers, and approve themselves at once to the heart. How better will you test what are the books in any language which have taken the highest place in its literature, than by observing what are those which have furnished the greatest number of obvious quotations to be applied in the common intercourse of life? It is the books which have the greatest number of passages understood and felt by all men that stand the highest in a nation's literature; those which, from the simple wisdom or true feeling which pervades them, have become familiar as household words. Now, any one who had not before considered this point would, I think, be struck if he turned to observe the way in which expressions taken from Holy Scripture have become mixed up with our whole language. Even tried by this test, by which we try mere human writings, no books would seem to approve themselves so much as the various books of Holy Scripture to the common feeling of men, or to be so rich in short passages owned by all to be gems of wisdom. Men in all ages and under all changes, whatever their station or degree of learning, have found something that spoke to their hearts and approved itself to their best thoughts almost in every psalm of David, or chapter of Isaiah, St. John, or St. Paul. Otherwise, the words of the sacred writers would not be so continually in their mouths, even when they are little thinking of their full meaning. Tested in this way, the true value of these books is found to lie, not in anything connected with disquisitions as to their history or the meaning of their obscure passages, but in simple words and short phrases, or plain histories, which bring

thoughts of God and Christ and his Gospel home to the heart of the least instructed of mankind. All this, we say, holds good if we look at Holy Scripture simply as we should look at any other book. Our Lord's, and the Apostles', and the Prophets' short proverbial sayings as to God and man, the simple records of the lives and deaths of God's saints in Old Testament and New, the parables which the youngest children love as setting heavenly truth clearly before them in a picture, the bright glimpses of good things in store for the faithful in Christ's presence in a better world—all these, if they were found even in mere human writings, would be easily understood and in their form very attractive even to the least instructive minds.

But, secondly, there is most obviously a great difference in this respect between Scripture and other books. The teaching of the Scripture requires to be spiritually discerned. God the Holy Ghost has to apply its lessons to the soul and conscience, and, if they are so applied, the great end for which the Scripture was written is accomplished. Certainly many a humble soul of the unlearned thus feeds, as it were, on short passages of Scripture, thanking God for the gracious thoughts they bring, as he receives them with a prayer that they may be blessed. You will scarcely find any poor peasant who can tell you the distinct bearing of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans regarded as a treatise involving many arguments; but who knows not that the deep views this Epistle gives of our utterly lost condition without Christ, of our blessed hopes secured through Him, are, as it were, the very life-blood and breath to many souls of the least instructed and most ignorant? We ought to call to mind continually how these sacred books speak by the Holy Spirit's

aid to the heart and conscience, even through their disjointed texts.

Moreover, thirdly, it ought to be remembered that the words of the Bible, as they address the Christian soul, are not, like the words of other history or other treatises, the dead record of deeds once done and words once spoken ages ago by men who have long been dead. Christ is called the Word of God for this amongst other reasons, because through Him God speaks ever to men's souls. And the words of the Bible, whatever may have been historically the connection or circumstances in which they were first committed to writing, are words addressed to us directly by Him who is the Word of God.* Consider what a difference this makes in our reading of the Scriptures. Do we esteem it a great privilege which the Apostles enjoyed that the Lord Jesus Christ was about their homes, sharing in their joys and sorrows, and that they had continual access to his advice during the three years of their earthly intercourse with him? If there be truth in Christ's promises, we ourselves enjoy no less a privilege. The words which we read in this book are no more the dead words of Moses, Isaiah, John, or Paul, they are no more concerned merely with what happened amongst the people of the Jews some three or two thousand years ago, they are the medium through which our Redeemer speaks to human souls now, quite as truly as in the days of his flesh, convincing them of sin, telling them of pardon, urging them to holiness.

In all these three ways then, the books of the Bible are intelligible to the least instructed: First, in that the most valuable of their words are those which in themselves are

* This is more fully illustrated in the next discourse.

plain and full of the expression of feelings easily apprehended and lessons easily applied. Second, in that it is through such plain passages especially that the Holy Spirit leads souls to God. Thirdly, in that God the Son—the Word of the Father—to this day speaks through these Scriptures directly to the religious impulses of the human soul, and moves us as directly as if the words were spoken now, fresh by a human, as they are certainly by a living present, friend. It is of great importance in an intellectual age that we should form a right estimate of the office thus assigned to God's Word. The thought of it will fill us with more of deep reverence when we open the volume, which contains, for ignorant and learned alike, the plain words of everlasting life.

And now, in conclusion, it will be well to call to mind how great a blessing it is to have messages from God thus conveyed to us. Sometimes, when men hear day after day the long and often apparently difficult lessons of the Old and New Testament read in church in the hearing of a mixed congregation, they are apt to think, even when they do not express the thought, that very many of those who hear can learn little from what is read to them. But from the obvious statement now made it follows, that this is an unwise judgment. The Church of England seeks to fulfil a great duty when it sets the whole of God's Word before the Christian congregation every year. Some might think it better to select short and striking passages, like the Gospels and Epistles chosen for the Sundays; but there is certainly an important Protestant principle involved in the deliberate reading each year of the whole Bible in the Lessons of our Church.

To-day, on the approach of Advent, we have reached the

last Sunday in the cycle of the Christian year. Let us pray that the many lessons which have been brought before us so deliberately by our Church from every part of Scripture during the last twelve months may not be lost to us; and in the new cycle on which we are entering let us ask ourselves, as to each chapter we hear in order—though there be hard passages in it difficult to understand—what is the one or what are the one or two plain lessons which it brings to us direct from God? We shall find such in every chapter, if we endeavour in the spirit of prayer to master their lessons, which have a wonderfully direct bearing for each of us on our own state of heart and life. It is, we have said, a great blessing to have such messages sent to us direct from God. What is it that makes it so difficult for the soul, even when it knows that Christ has died for it, to rise in thought to that place where Christ sits at the right hand of God? We need some direct intercourse with God and Christ to save our hearts from being all taken up with common worldly matters. And as in the act of prayer our hearts speak to God in Christ, so, through the ministry of the Word, God through Christ speaks to us. Thus the soul is brought into direct communication with Him, without whom it cannot live. Prayer and the ministry of the Word—these were the things to which the Apostles in their day gave themselves, as the best means of their being enabled to bring blessings on men's souls; and through these same means now Christ, seated on his mediatorial throne, raises us to the Father, and brings the Father down to dwell with us. May the Lord Jesus Christ grant us to profit by the ministry of the Word!

II.—THE CONSOLATIONS OF THE WORD.



ST. MATTHEW xi. 28.

“Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

FIRST consider the Speaker: “Come unto me all ye that labour, and *I* will give you rest.” These words continue, it has been said, the thought suggested in v. 5, “To the poor the Gospel is preached.” Christ, the speaker, preaches glad tidings to the poor—the poor in outward circumstances and the poor in spirit—and invites the weary and heavy laden to come unto Him. The words gain great additional force when considered as proceeding direct from Christ. We ought to think of them as so spoken now. We are right in holding that not only historically did Christ once speak these words while He was on earth, but that they have a present as well as a historical sense, and that He speaks them always. The words are thus repeated in His name every time the Lord’s Supper is administered among us; and every time especially that it is administered by the bed of the sick or dying, the words are felt to proceed fresh and direct from Him, bidding tears to cease and the drooping heart to take courage. “Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and,” as the Prayer-book version gives the words, “I will refresh you.”

Our Lord’s words in the Gospels are, of course, of two

kinds, or may be regarded in two aspects, either as having been spoken once for all historically, or as fresh and living, and as it were repeated by Him day by day in all ages. It is this latter view of Christ's words which gives them their surpassing power. The Gospels are no mere record of things past, but give forth an ever-fresh stream of inspired truth, quickening men's souls in all ages. In some few instances it may be that the record of our Lord's words is but the record of the past, telling us merely what He said to men of His own time, with a reference which is restricted to them and their circumstances. But usually He speaks to them as the representatives of all ages. Often, even when His words seem simplest and most special in their application, they have also a deeper spiritual meaning, by which they address all men. Take the words of the fifth verse, already quoted, "To the poor the Gospel is preached." At first they may seem but the statement of an evidence addressed to the disciples of the Baptist, showing the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy at that time in Christ's preaching literally to the poor. More closely viewed, they are immediately found to express a characteristic of the Gospel at all times; and further still, they are found to be a very powerful ever-present source of comfort to the poor, since He who at first thus preached has not, like human teachers, done His work in His generation and passed away, but ever lives, not in the system only which He established, but lives really and personally now, as in the days of His flesh, the friend of the poor, bringing glad tidings to their souls.

The record in history or biography of what men did or said is only valuable when their deeds and sayings are not restricted in their application to their own day. One of the best ways

to test whether any writer is a real genius—not a sayer merely of clever things to serve an immediate end in his own generation—is to consider what sentences he has uttered which have become household words, and are as true and fresh now as when he first uttered them. Thus it is, *e. g.*, that a great poet is the ever-fresh oracle of nature—his words, poured forth at first at random, seem really to have been spoken under the guidance of some higher power: centuries pass and all outward circumstances change, but men still turn to the record of his lightest words, for he seems by an almost superhuman instinct to have caught and embodied those natural feelings which know no change while the world lasts. In the true poet men find an imperishable store of world-wide feelings—in the true philosopher, of eternal truths. But it would be derogatory to the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, as recorded in the Gospel, to dwell only on this characteristic which is common to them with other words—a characteristic which they possess most pre-eminently indeed in degree, but still somewhat similarly in kind, with the words of great human teachers. Christ's words are indeed the very truth itself, while the words of great uninspired men are but wonderful guesses at it. But this is not all. Rather note how Christ's words are everlasting in their application, not because they are so very true, but, still further, because He himself lives ever and applies them ever fresh to His people, while all human teachers, whose words have come down to us, having served their generation, fall asleep and become powerless. Christ lives ever, and speaks now, as really by His Holy Spirit acting through His Word, as He did in the days of His flesh. It is this we have said which gives to the words of our text their great force. They are no record of a

thing past in itself, however great and undying in its consequences—they are no mere statement of a general principle, however eternally true. They are to all who hear them in faith still, as in the days when they were first uttered, the kind words of an ever-living, ever-watchful friend. “Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

Now, though it be pre-eminently the words of our Lord Jesus Christ which have so obviously this undying force as the personal appeal of a living speaker to His people in all ages, because Christ, who once spoke the words on earth, lives still and dies never, and repeats them daily as it were from heaven—giving them by His Holy Spirit an ever-quickening power—though this, I say, is pre-eminently true of the words of Christ, since He is the only human teacher who is divine, still the same thing is really true of all inspired words of warning or of comfort spoken even by mere human prophets. True that David and Isaiah, and the fellows of their noble company, have long since fallen asleep, and the blessed Apostles too; and wherever they may be living with God, the greatest saints either of the old or the new covenant have no power now to act upon men’s hearts, as Christ has—no power except through the letter of the historical record of what they once spake; but David, in his inspired moments, or Isaiah, was after all but the instrument through which He spake who lives for ever to influence His people. No other theory warrants the separation of the sacred from all mere human writings—no other entitles them to their name the Word of God. The inspired warnings and consolations both of the Old Testament and of the Acts of the Apostles, as much as those of the Gospels, are really the words

of an ever-present, ever-living friend. The Psalms, *e. g.*, as we use them in our worship, are so used not as a mere record of what David once felt: He who inspired David brings them fresh now to His faithful people's hearts—as fresh and powerful as on the day when they were first sung. And the real Author or Revealer of the truths they tell lives now and works upon His people, though David has been long dead. It is this thought of the living personality and ever-fresh power of the Being from whom inspired enunciations of truth come that gives them so peculiar a character, and separates them from all mere human statements, even of the highest truth.

I suppose that every thoughtful student has been struck with the great difference between the belief in God manifested in the Old Testament, and even the purest and highest efforts of mere human Deism. Now here both the human and the Divine systems teach the same great truth of the rule of one Universal Father, who cares for His creatures. How is it that they teach it with such very different degrees of force? The reason is, I think, to be found in the very point we are now insisting on, the distinct and direct personal appeals of the Great Being Himself, through the words of inspired teachers; while the best and truest statements of the mere human teacher seem never to rise above the assertion of his own probable conclusions as to a Being who is afar off and shrouded in impenetrable darkness. The difference is in fact as great as, or greater than, that in the book of Job—between, on the one hand, the wandering reasonings of the patriarch and his friends on a question obviously too deep for them, and, on the other, the awful and distinct decision of God Himself, when He speaks to them

manifested in the whirlwind: and the distinct personal form of these appeals of God, through the inspired writers, as made at first, assures the mind of the reader that God, their author, does not make them once for all, and then keep silence, but that He is as powerful to give them life and power now as He was when He first uttered them, and is, in fact, through His Spirit operating by His Word, perpetually reiterating them. Thus the Old Testament speaks to all ages of the being and attributes of the Universal Father with a force and power of direct personal appeal, such as the noblest and truest systems of human Deism cannot reach. It is not merely that the Old Testament teaches the clear doctrine of a personal God, endowed with personal qualities, the intelligent and beneficent Father and Ruler of the Universe, while most human systems are indistinct from their more or less losing the thought of the personal God in dim Pantheistic visions of a Spirit of life, scarce separable, except in idea, from the universe which He animates: even where it most distinctly teaches the doctrine of one personal God—a personal Ruler and Father—human philosophy wants the force and living power in its teaching which breathes through all inspired enunciations of the same truth. Let any one compare different passages taken at random which teach the same doctrine—from Plato on the one hand, and from the Book of Job on the other, or the Psalms. How different are the probable conjectures of human reason from that direct appeal of Jehovah Himself, which we find in the Old Testament, while He manifests through the words now, as in former times, His existence and His power. No human reasonings or teaching as to the Great Father of the Universe ever came up to this. How great, in truth, is the quickening force given

through this name Jehovah to all Jewish faith in God! Jehovah was a father and a king. The patriarchs had heard His voice and spoken with Him as a man with his friend. Sinai had been moved at His presence; He had divided the waters with His glorious arm. The Sanctuary was His dwelling-place—the Law was written with His finger. Think not that these images had aught in them which lowered the great God of heaven and earth from the pure spiritual conceptions which the saints form of Him. The faithful Jews knew as well as we that God was a Spirit, and these images and visible or audible manifestations of Him no more lowered their conceptions than the thoughts which faithful Christians form of God are lowered because they worship Him manifested in Jesus Christ. In truth, the thought of these sensible manifestations which God has given of Himself but seem to bring Him more palpably and directly near to them as a teacher and a friend; so that, when God's Word appeals to them, they recognise in it the tones of the voice of One whom they honour and love.

Thus much, then, of the Speaker in the text—the Speaker, also, of all inspired words of consolation both in the Old Testament and New. He is a friend; He is very near; He lives and addresses us now, speaking directly and distinctly to all suffering souls,—“Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

Secondly, consider the persons addressed—addressed thus directly and personally, now as in old times, by God in Christ—the weary and heavy laden—those who need rest.

“All ye that labour and are heavy laden” (*κοπιῶντες καὶ πεφορτισμένοι*). These two original words express, it has been remarked, like the translation, the first an active, the

second a passive, idea—those who labour and those who are heavy laden. The soul, for example, which knows its sinfulness, which is conscious of something that separates it from God its highest good, labours hard to break down the barrier. Once fully aroused to a sense of sin, there is no work which it will not undertake, if haply it may appease God. Hence, I suppose, the strange self-tormenting devotion of many forms of heathenism. Certainly there is often a deep melancholy in heathens; the soul is distressed, and would gladly crush and destroy the body, if only by so doing it could gain rest. Hence also the mistaken, indeed, but most earnest and laborious efforts of an aroused but only half-converted Christian soul, which sees God in Christ only as a stern lawgiver and judge, and cannot yet embrace Him as a Saviour and reconciled Father. Thus Luther writes, describing his early career in his convent: “One only expression arrested my attention in the Epistle to the Romans, —‘Therein is the righteousness (justice) of God revealed.’ I hated that expression, because I had learned to understand by it that active justice, by which God is just and punishes the unjust and sinners.”* All readers of Luther’s Life know the strange and ineffectual struggles which came with this thought—the profound melancholy of the young monk—his fierce inward conflicts—his unceasing labours of discipline and self-denial. “If ever,” says he, “a monk obtained admission into heaven by his monkish merits, I should have deserved that success.”† His health and reason seemed both failing under the energy of an aroused soul, believing, with all the intensity of his wondrous faith, that he was at enmity with

* Quoted by Waddington, ‘History of Reformation,’ vol. i. ch. ii. p. 46.

† Ibid., p. 44.

God, and that he could only become reconciled by labour; till at length, he says,* God took compassion on him, and the whole appearance of Scripture seemed new. Many a soul, very different from his, with but ordinary acuteness of conscience and powers of endurance, still knows the same struggles, fears God, and labours hard to appease Him, and still feels, with all its labour, that it cannot cast off the burden of sin, and is very heavy laden. Christ, then, calls such in the text to come to Him. Faith in Christ, the heart-felt conviction that He is merciful and full of love, and ready to receive not sinners generally alone, but the very sinner now before Him, gives a sense of rest. Life is no longer a hopeless struggle to appease a hard taskmaster; it becomes the free energy of a loving spirit striving to obey a friend: then follows a feeling of rest, which, perfected by the Holy Spirit, is "the peace of God."†

But it is not only weariness from a sense of sin that the Lord Jesus Christ pities. Truly all other trials are designed by God's mercy to produce spiritual longings. If they fail so to affect the heart, they but harden it. Sometimes the wounds God inflicts but exasperate the sufferer; he is soured, and his soul more estranged from God. Sometimes they are borne, as best they may be, by the mere effort of a manly spirit determined to look at the bright side of the picture, even when there is much in it that is dreary: our grief is, as it were, gulped down, and the effort only serves to make us more thoughtless and worldly. But if any earthly calamity achieves the work for which God designed it, then, softening the soul, it makes it to yearn for His friendship. There is

* Quoted by Waddington, 'History of Reformation,' vol. i. ch. ii., p. 47.

† Cf. Olshausen in loc.

nothing like the practical conviction of our utter wretchedness, forced on us by calamity, for bringing the soul humbled to Him who can alone give strength. Sickness, poverty, loss of friends, are proved by experience to be all-powerful instruments for drawing the soul to God. God designs all earthly sorrows to produce an earnest desire for spiritual reconciliation with Him. Hence it is not merely from our feeling of the benevolence of the Lord Jesus Christ and His desire to diminish the earthly sufferings of His creatures, if this may be done consistently with their soul's welfare, but rather distinctly from our perceiving that He longs for their salvation, that we consider Him as inviting all who suffer under earthly trials, as well as the soul that sorrows for sin, to come to Him. "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden."

In that august picture which the Gospels set before us of Christ the physician of the body, surrounded by the maimed, paralytic, possessed, we must not overlook His tender solicitude for the souls of those whose bodies He relieves: so that He is revealed certainly as tending the soul through the body's ailments. Therefore, as the physician of the soul, Christ calls the heavy laden in body to come to Him. There is no form of human suffering to which Christ's invitation in the text is not addressed: nay, our very suffering is, in itself, an invitation from Christ. All right-minded Christians know this who have any practical acquaintance in their own persons with distress. Truly it would be a great trial for a man to go through all his days in prosperity. And indeed God does not allow very many of us to be exposed to this trial. Some have comparatively light distresses. Still, none but those who are borne up by an unnatural buoyancy of spirits, or whose feelings have no depth, and with whom, therefore,

sorrow never penetrates below the surface, can pass on without much anxiety of some kind to middle age and their decline. Men judge often of one another in this matter very much amiss. Often they will envy each other's easy lot, when they know nothing of each other's trials, and judge only by the smiling outside. The most prosperous man has usually his secret sorrow, and God has sent it to him for a gracious purpose. The felt symptoms of impaired health are a perpetual *memento mori*—suggesting not only how short and uncertain life is, but also how miserable must be its close without Christ. How does the tender memory of a lost Christian friend call the soul away from the world's turmoil, and raise it to the calm presence where the saints in peace surround the throne! Ah! my friends, desire not unbroken prosperity on earth—the very prosperous are often very worldly. Christ uses our sorrows as the voice by which He speaks His invitation.

There is no form of human suffering which God does not intend to be thus sanctified, and there is none in which the invitation of the text, if regarded, will not bring comfort. All sufferers both in mind and in body are invited. We need not speak more of what are distinctly called spiritual struggles. Consider how touching is that influence with which Christian worship often sways and soothes a disordered fancy. The harp of David calmed the spirit of Saul in the outbursts of his madness, and certainly the Psalms of David still speak comfort to hearts amazed by the sudden overthrow of reason. How often are such sufferers very constant in their attendance on the house of God, and able to appreciate the soothing influence of simple Christian truths, when all power of argument and steadfastness of will has

been destroyed by their miserable calamity! Our Lord did not overlook the sufferings of those who were lunatic while He was on earth. Neither does He overlook them now.

Or consider sufferings of a very different kind, which it is vain to deny must be rife in this age. A man, suppose of active and inquiring mind, living in days when all principles are sifted, has been taught in his youth to rest his soul's hopes on some baseless system of authority, which crumbles when, grown to full age, he tries to lean his weight upon it. He has been deceived, he thinks, in what he first trusted, and his soul is filled with unwelcome doubts, lest there be nothing that he can lean upon. It is not the outworks of a traditionary system, or the mere ecclesiastical ornaments, as it were, of his religion, that now fail him; he is brought, against his will, into a miserable uncertainty, lest all historical Christianity be a dream. What then shall give him peace when he is thus tried? He cannot return to the teaching of his childhood, for he believes he has found it false; and the shock thus given to his whole spirit has unsettled all his religious thoughts. We are told that this state is very common among more inquiring spirits in the present day, and it is a state certainly of great temptation and of great risk lest the man make for life and for eternity utter shipwreck of his faith. But if his soul be indeed earnest in its desires after truth and holiness, doubtless the very greatness of his danger but enhances our certainty that the Lord Jesus Christ will give relief. There is no question of the nice balancing of evidences from criticism and history when the Lord of the soul speaks directly to it and calls it to Himself. All is safe if God, through His Holy Spirit, shall stir the soul's religious longings, revealing Himself to it in its

inmost feelings as a merciful Redeemer—as one who has both the power and the will to quell the storms which threaten to engulf it, and bring it safely to the port of rest. God may employ some very common means to work this great end, some simple hymn or text long forgotten ; the recollection of some prayer of childhood may bring the soul to such a frame that it is no longer deaf to the personal invitation of one who loves it with an everlasting love, and gradually its cloudy doubts break up as it feels itself warmed by the brightness which reveals the personal presence of God.

Or turn to sufferings of a more common kind, sufferings which beset all homes. I will not speak of quiet country homes, which still retain so much of outward resemblance to Eden, though sooner or later they know sorrow. But have we ever lived in a great town? Perhaps we know one of those towns, where all things seem bright and smiling—some old seat of learning like this,* where we wander through gardens and amongst noble buildings, and recal the great names of former days, while all things around us speak of the calm delights of learned ease ; or perhaps we know well some brilliant capital, with its gorgeous palaces, its parks and spacious squares, where, in fine weather, the fair and the gay are hurrying to and fro enjoying the luxury of seeing and being seen, while others hasten to the pleasant cares of the court or the senate-house to play their bright part in the splendid drama of which their whole nation and the civilized world are the spectators. Truly we need not be told, looking even on such a scene, how in the most favoured seats of calmness or of luxury the common ills of human nature prey even on the gayest. No refinement of modern civilization,

* Preached in Oxford.

though it may greatly improve, can quite purify, the noxious atmosphere which mysteriously spreads disease. Fever often selects the fairest form, for the fresh blood that springs in young veins is its best food; and it rejoices, in mockery, to heighten for a while the beauty which it means so speedily to destroy. The richest dress, how often does it cover a heart very ill at ease! "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden." These are words which cannot be long unwelcome to the gayest and most brilliant.

But rather, if we have lived in a great town, do we know the quarter where the poor dwell? In some towns the poor are penned up out of sight, and the rich hardly ever see them, except that some few stray sons or daughters of misery wander stealthily into the bright streets. Elsewhere we meet at every turn the appalling contrast between magnificence and rags, between luxurious self-indulgence and the pinched looks which tell of a hard struggle to keep soul and body together from day to day. If sickness and sorrow are hard to bear with all attendance in the gilded chamber, they are worse neglected in the squalid cellar. Follow the poor to their homes in a great town, and say whether life could be worth enduring if it were not for the Lord Jesus Christ.

There is one vast field of human wretchedness in this age and nation which it is well for us steadily to contemplate. Here, say, is the father of a family—a working man; he lives in some close court of a great city, where he plies, as best he may, his unhealthy trade. The man is not over-worked, for, indeed, continuous labour is far from being one of the miseries of the poor. He has far more hours of leisure than he desires, for work, say, is very slack, and pay very scanty. He is no drunkard, but a well-conducted man enough. He

is intelligent; his many long spare hours give him abundant time; and at home or in his club he reads many books, and talks much with men hard-pressed like himself on many difficult and exciting subjects. The books he reads truly are not likely to improve his moral or religious state, for the cause of Satan in this matter is served with much more zeal and wisdom than the cause of Christ. It is alarming to know how books and periodicals of a bad social and moral tone circulate, written in a bold, manly style. From these the man learns much both of good and bad. Let me say he knows often a vast deal more intellectually in his rough way than many who go with literary distinction from a university. I will not say that his knowledge does much good for him. He has not been at church or chapel for years; at first his poor clothes made him ashamed to appear there in decent company, and in the countless mass of his parishioners the clergyman has very seldom spoken to him or visited his home; and now he has come to hold a decided opinion that preaching and praying do the poor no good. He is not exactly an infidel, but he has a shrewd suspicion that religion is a device upheld for the benefit of the rich. Meanwhile poverty is very galling: he cannot get enough work; his wife and children are half starved; and he hates to beg. What wonder that he is altogether soured, looking on the middle and upper classes as selfish and tyrannical; ready for any dangerous enterprise if only opportunity occurred; remaining quiet only because he is so worn down by the crushing weight of circumstances that he is powerless for mischief as for good? There are many thousands of this class in large towns, and they are deeply to be pitied. Their life is full of suffering, and they have never been led to seek comfort

where alone comfort in poverty can be found. Often such men turn to bad moral courses; no wonder that they try madly to snatch pleasure where they can. The life of the suffering poor must be miserable, unless they can be taught to hold intercourse with Christ. That He cares for them; that, as He lived amongst them one of themselves while He was on earth, so He has never forgotten them, but is ready to speak now direct to their souls—nothing but this thought can give dignity to their low estate.

And the comfort Christ offers when He thus speaks to such sufferers is real. He does not, indeed, directly give them work, food, and raiment, though still indirectly we do find that a religious poor man grows less miserable in his worldly circumstances: whether it be that extreme poverty is somehow allied with irregular and bad habits, and that therefore the Christian poor, freed from such habits, are freed also from half their sufferings; or that the religious poor in a Christian country are sure to find religious friends, who look out for them and help them for Christ's sake. Certainly somehow they are helped indirectly in their worldly state. But what is better, directly they are soothed and supported daily by their intercourse with Christ; they are saved from a soured temper preying on itself. Misfortunes are certainly lighter for him who knows that they can at the longest last but for a short time in his long existence; and that death, which is the worst of human ills, opens the door to admit him to a place where he will be happy with his Saviour. Certainly the best and only consolation for the overburdened poor is in the invitation to come to Christ.

If this world of ours be thickly peopled with sufferers in mind and body, where shall they find rest? There is only

one in whom they can find it. Is the world full of the overburdened, the oppressed, the sick, and the dying? there is close at hand, if they will only believe it, one who hears their most secret sigh, and is ready to wipe their tears. The eye of faith sees the august form of the Man of Sorrows standing at every wretched door ready to enter in and wait on every sick bed. His outward image may not be paraded in our streets, but we know and feel that He is present really. Here is the one central thought to which all suffering humanity is encouraged to turn, the Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief.

III.—FAITH IN CHRIST'S PERSON.

(PREACHED IN CARLISLE CATHEDRAL.)

ST. JOHN xv. 4.

“ Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself except it abide in the vine ; no more can ye except ye abide in me.”

LOOKING at the verses which follow these words, we shall see that the Lord Jesus Christ here mentions three blessings as springing from what He calls “ abiding in Him.”

First. The blessing of being able to live a good Christian life. v. 5 : “ He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit ; for without me ye can do nothing.”

Secondly. The blessing of having a good hope that we shall enjoy everlasting happiness ; for it is certainly stated that not to abide in Christ is to be lost ; and it follows that to abide in Him is to be saved. v. 6 : “ If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch and is withered ; and men gather them and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.” But (it is implied), on the other hand, if a man abide in me he is saved from such danger,

Thirdly. The blessing is promised of free access through Christ to the Father, so that the soul which abides in Christ is able to pray to God as a child to a father, and has its prayers answered. And this interchange of communion makes us live in the enjoyment of spiritual religion through the felt nearness of God to the soul. v. 7 : “ If ye abide in

me and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will and it shall be done unto you."

If all this be so, if what is here called "to abide in Christ" be productive of such blessings, it is very important that we should understand what is meant by the phrase.

To abide in Christ—what do the words mean? Obviously, in the first place, they do not mean merely to be a member of the outward Church of Christ. When Christ in this passage calls Himself the vine and His people the branches (in the 1st, 2nd, and 4th verses), He may very well mean by the vine with its branches to represent His outward Church, all members of which, even through their outward profession of the Gospel, and their outward enjoyment of its privileges (sacramental and other), are necessarily in some way connected with Him, the source of all spiritual life. But He supposes that certain branches of the vine may be unfruitful and may wither, receiving no sap from the tree to which they belong. v. 2: "Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he (my Father the husbandman) taketh away." There may be branches then—branches in me, says Christ—which are sapless and lifeless. These have to be renewed. Outward admission then to the Church of Christ by baptism, and the outward privileges enjoyed of Christian teaching and Christian training, do not constitute "abiding in Christ." There is something much more in the phrase than this.

Let all persons who have enjoyed the great privilege of being admitted into the Church of Christ in infancy, and afterwards of being brought up in His Church—who have had Christian prayers offered for them from the earliest dawn of their reason in the holy body to which by profession they belong—who have been taught the lessons of Christ's word,

and have been trained to pray to God through Him, consider how melancholy it will be if all these advantages come to nothing, if at last they fall into such a state that they can be as little said to abide in Christ, as the heathen who have never heard of Him. Their case will be far worse than that of the heathen, inasmuch as it is a far greater evil to turn aside from Christ and reject Him, than to lie from the first in dark heathen ignorance which is not self-caused nor deliberately chosen. It is a fearful thing to be in Christ, in the lower sense of having been baptized and trained in Christianity—to have been in Christ, and not to abide in Him.

Read carefully again v. 2: "Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he (the Father) taketh away." v. 4: "As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself except it abide in the vine, no more can ye except ye abide in me." v. 6: "If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch and is withered, and men gather them and cast them into the fire, and they are burned." Whose are all of us here present? We are all of us professedly united to Christ, some of us by very solemn vows as His ministers—others not thus bound, still united to Him even by the daily calling He has assigned us as members of an ancient Christian corporation, which through many changes, as generation followed generation now well nigh for a thousand years has met in this locality to set forth our Redeemer's praise—all of us are united to Him by the very name we bear of Christians, by our presence here, taking part in Christ's worship. Nominally and by profession we are all in Christ. Let us see that we abide in Him in the true full sense which alone can avail for our salvation.

And here remark that obviously in the word abide (*μένειν*)

there is implied continuance. A man does not abide in Christ who serves Him as it were by fits and starts, who one day has, or thinks he has, his religious feelings strongly excited, and another goes back into worldliness. There are people who always seem to follow the character of the society into which from time to time they are thrown; and, though quite without any intentional hypocrisy, if they are with religious people they feel, and naturally, the great help which the sight of the consistent piety around them lends to their own weak spiritual desires; but when again they are with worldly people, all their talk and thoughts become worldly. Now there is no "abiding" in such Christian impressions as a mind like this has received. Still less is there in the impression of him whose strong passions or weak principles, however much he may in his heart approve Christ's service, and however much he may make general professions of allegiance to Him, cannot resist the temptations of desire, or fear, or jealousy, or sudden anger, which are continually urging him to act in a way which he knows Christ abhors.

It is to be noted that in the second verse of this chapter our Lord describes those who really abide in Him as steadily advancing in their character, as by the grace of God perpetually improving. "Every branch that beareth fruit He (the Father) purgeth it that it may bring forth more fruit." Purgeth it—that is (keeping up the figure of a vine and branches), prunes it, cleans it, cutting off the worthless parts, that it may have room and air and health, and may grow steadily. He then alone can be said with propriety to abide in Christ who is by the grace of God a consistent advancing Christian.

But the phrases "to be a Christian," and "to abide in Christ,"

though they may be used to express the same idea, certainly do set it forth under very different aspects. A man might follow Christ as we follow any human teacher: His discourses, His example, the lessons which His Apostles taught, instinct with what they learned from Him, may furnish the rule or law or system to which we honestly desire that our lives should be conformed. And with a great many well-meaning and in their way worthy persons in all ages their Christianity goes no further than this. As amongst the ancients one man was a follower of Socrates, another of Pythagoras—as one man in modern times has followed Luther, another Calvin—so we might all profess to follow Christ, making only this great distinction, that our Lord's teaching, seeing who He is—the Eternal Son of God—is far more true, far more holy, than that of any human guide. And a man who thus viewed Christianity and his Christian profession might express his belief in Christ naturally enough by the phrase "I am a Christian"—that is, a follower of Christ; but he could hardly say without hypocrisy, "I abide in Christ." And what I would now urge is this, that throughout the whole New Testament—in no part of it more forcibly than in our Lord's own discourse in these concluding chapters of St. John—a whole set of phrases occurs, expressing deep spiritual ideas indicative of a closeness of union between Christ and His people's souls, such as could never bind disciples to any human teacher; and these phrases express what seems to have always been regarded by the Apostles as of the essence of real spiritual Christianity.

A man to be a Christian in the Apostle's sense must abide in Christ. Look at the chapter before us: v. 4. "Abide in me and I in you."—v. 10. "Ye shall abide in my love, as I

abide in my Father's love."—v. 11. "That my joy might remain in you."—v. 14. "Ye are my friends." Or consider chap. xiv. v. 23: "If a man love me, he will keep my words, and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him and make our abode with him." Or chap. xvii. v. 22-23: (I pray for all them which shall believe in me), "That they may be one even as we are one, I in them and Thou in me." The idea indeed is of continual recurrence. It is not necessary to seek for a multitude of examples. We have it put very pointedly by St. Paul, 2 Cor. xiii. 5: "Prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?"

Now the point to which I wish to come is this, that the whole teaching of our Lord and His Apostles represents our Saviour as no dead or absent teacher who has left behind Him a legacy of truth for His disciples, who may be indeed destined to come again, but who in the mean season may safely be regarded as merely speaking to us through the record of His teaching. It is of the very essence of Christianity that we should regard Him as one ever living, ever near, ever present. It seems to be of the very essence of Apostolical Christianity to represent that, for every man who is to be a real Christian, there must grow up, so to speak, a real intimacy between the soul and Christ. There are many other aspects in which our Christianity is to be set before us; but this seems the very foundation of all others. He who does not thus realise the presence of Christ is a Christian in a very different sense from that of the Apostles. He has not made one step in Apostolical Christianity. A great deal more than this may be meant by the phrase "abiding in Christ," but this at least must be meant

by it. Let us see that for us such phrases have a real meaning, that the Lord Jesus Christ is looked upon by each of us as a near, present guide and friend, the Lord and guardian of our souls. There are, we say, many other aspects in which we are to look upon our Saviour when we are enabled to take in the whole range of the Apostle's teaching as to our relations to Him, but this seems to be the simplest and the first. It will be well now before we close to see whether we can in any way make plain the position and importance of this doctrine.

Take a child, a Christian child. How is he to be reared as a Christian? In our Church Catechism this is the very first idea which we call upon him to realise, viz. that he is a member of Christ. This is the parallel figure to that set before us in the words of the text; here we have the vine and its branches, elsewhere the body with the head and members. The child is urged to realise that he is a member of Christ, united with the Lord Jesus Christ, as the limbs with the body and its head. And if you wish the child to understand what you thus make him repeat, you will address him perhaps in some such words as these: "My child, you do not stand alone; you have an earthly father and mother to whom you are closely joined, but they may die any day and leave you alone. You have besides them one whom you cannot see, who loves you more tenderly than they do, a friend who can never die and will never leave you unless you leave Him. As a good shepherd loves his lambs and helps them and cherishes them, so this friend loves and watches over you. And though you cannot see Him, it will not be difficult for you to think of Him. He was once a child like you, as weak and helpless in His body as you are. You can know no

trouble either now or in your after life, except the trouble of sin, which He has not known before you ; and thus you may better understand how He feels very tenderly for all your weakness. But this friend is perfectly pure and holy ; and if He is to continue to love you, and you are to continue His child, you must grow like Him, and herein He most shows His love that He helps you thus to grow. Think not because you cannot see Him that He is not near, that He does not hear you ; though He willingly became so weak and humble, He is the Son of God, and as God He is everywhere and is all-powerful. He sees you in the darkness when you are sleeping ; He knows your thoughts. It is a blessed thing, if you can understand it, to have such a friend. Strive, my child, ever to keep near to Him ; ask Him to help you when you feel weak. Ask Him to present your prayers to God the Father. He is sure to continue to love you if you are heartily anxious for His love. Let us open the Gospels and read what is there written of Him. You will there find how He said, ‘Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not.’ You may read there the history of all He did while He was on earth, from His childhood onwards to His manhood and His death, and what He said. Or turn to the beginning of the Revelation, and you will there read how He appeared to St. John after He had gone back to glory in Heaven, bright and glorious and awful, yet full of love. Try to think of Him continually, and the more you think of Him the more He will help you to love Him, and the better as life goes on will you be able to go through all you have to do as He would have you do it.”

Do we set the Lord Jesus Christ in some such way as this before the thoughts of a simple child ? This seems the safest

and best starting-point in preaching the Gospel to a child. Much has to be added to this simple view—much as to the nature of sin, and what Christ has done to save us from it; but this view of Christ's presence seems the best starting-point. And we can never dispense in after life with any Christian truth, however simple, which helped us in our childhood. All through our life it will be well if we can cultivate the childlike confidence with which a simple Christian child feels that he may turn to the good Shepherd who loves his soul and is ever near to him. The way then, in which, if we are wise, we try to lead a child to conceive of the nearness of the Lord Jesus Christ, may set before us thoughts which, for all souls, both of old and young, must lie at the very root of their Christianity, if they are to believe and live as the Apostles did.

I close with one remark, which may help to set before us how truly earnest Christianity in the Apostles' days thus realized the presence of Christ. St. John's love to the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, you may perhaps think, grew from his earthly intercourse with Him, since Christ, on earth, selected John for His especial human friendship. But St. Paul had no such intercourse with the Lord—if he had seen Him in the days of His flesh he had then never known Him. But this love to the person of the Lord grew as strong in St. Paul when he became a Christian, as in any of the Apostles. It breathes through all his writings. You cannot read any Epistle without seeing that he had the thought of the Lord's nearness to him ever in his mind, and that he felt his whole soul moved by the intercourse which this nearness gave him. Let us strive to live in this continual feeling of the nearness of Christ to us. It will be the best safeguard

against sin. How can we sin in so holy a presence? It will be the best help to growth in grace—for we must grow like Him of whom we are ever thinking, and whose presence is felt to be our greatest blessing. Lastly, it will rob death of its terrors if we come to look upon it as admission into the more immediate seen presence of a friend whom, even when unseen, we have learned to think of as very near.

This last effect it had certainly on St. Paul. Nothing more sustained his spirit in all trials, and when death approached, than the feeling of the nearness of Christ. Witness the two famous passages: the first, when he was looking forward to death at a distance, Philipp. i. 21, 23: "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart and to be with Christ; which is far better." The second, when, later, death seemed to come quite close to him, 2 Timothy, iv. 6: "I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand." 8. "Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day." Verses 16, 17, 18: "At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me. Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom." It was because St. Paul had long lived with a continual feeling of the personal nearness of Christ that he so naturally felt sure that Christ would be with him in death, and after death for ever.

IV.—NEITHER CIRCUMCISION NOR UNCIRCUMCISION.

GAL. vi. 15.

“In Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature.”

THIS sentiment must have been much in St. Paul's heart; for he gives utterance to something like it several times. Thus, most explicitly (1 Cor. vii. 19), “Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God.” And in the chapter before our text (v. 6), “In Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love.” What then do the words mean thus put forward by St. Paul? What do they mean in their particular application as he first used them? And what is the general principle, if any, which they teach as applicable to ourselves?

Was St. Paul a Latitudinarian? When he says neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but the keeping the commandments of God, did he mean—

“For modes of faith let graceless zealots fight,
His can't be wrong whose life is in the right”?

I think not. This was very alien from the earnest spirit of his burning zeal. What did he mean then? Neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love. Neither circumcision availeth any-

thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature. Has he not contended most earnestly in this very Epistle (ch. v. v. 2), "Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised Christ shall profit you nothing"? and speaking of those who declared circumcision to be necessary, does he not say (ch. i. v. 6), "I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into another Gospel, which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the Gospel of Christ"? And again, does he not say of these teachers (ch. v. v. 12), "I would they were even cut off which trouble you"? There is no lukewarm indifference here, assuming the cloak of a calm philosophy, which will not vex itself with the foolish quarrels of contending theological partisans. There is all the living zeal of one who deeply loves the truth, and knows that if truth is sacrificed God is dishonoured. And yet he certainly says calmly—Would to God you would understand that the things you are contending about are trifles; that the fault is not in doing them or leaving them undone, but in magnifying them into undue importance. Do you wish to submit yourselves to the ritual observances of the Jewish law? I Paul do the same at times when I think it will help on the cause of Christ. I would not offend the prejudices of my Jewish countrymen. I caused Timothy to be circumcised because of his Jewish blood. I am ready myself to observe the Jewish feasts—to go through the forms of law in taking a vow. I become all things to all men in these matters indifferent, if by any means I may win some. This is the Apostle's language. He loves souls far more than his own opinions. He does not desire to make a party, or act with a party in putting down the ritual observances of his Jewish countrymen. He is

ready for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake to omit them, or maintain them whenever he can without offence, if he may do good to souls. He enters kindly, and with sympathising love, even into the weaknesses of his brethren's prejudices, and bears with them if, from old associations, they love any of these indifferent things. Is not this the very spirit of those other loving words of 1 Cor. viii. 13—"Wherefore, if meat (a thing indifferent) make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend"? He had his liberty, he gloried in it, yet he would not so use it as to give offence to any. Here is an example for us all—to be very thoughtful each of the other's weaknesses; to bear one with another; to be ready to run the risk, if need be, at times, even of appearing inconsistent in the eyes of a hard world, or wanting in zeal, provided our consciences bear witness that we are seeking with a single eye the advancement of the cause of Christ in the salvation of our brothers' souls, by bearing one with another in love. Here is an example for all of us; to bear one with another; to make allowances one for another. How much better would it be for the Church of Christ, if we all acted for our Lord and Saviour's sake in this large-hearted spirit of wise and kindly consideration one for another! We should still have differences of opinion, and perhaps parties, but we should have none of the bitterness of a worldly party-spirit intruding itself into the Church of God.

But still St. Paul's charity cannot be misunderstood. Did these same persons who loved the ritual observances of the Jewish law from the associations of antiquity or any other cause, not rest contented with using them to assist their own

growth in holiness, to which they felt them to be conducive? Did they try to thrust them upon others? Did they so forget the simplicity of the Lord Jesus Christ's teaching as to make circumcision, or any Jewish rite, an essential of salvation; narrowing the limits of Christ's Church, curtailing its liberty, and binding a yoke upon their fellow-Christians; and teaching them also practically, if not in so many words, to attach more importance to ceremonials than to faith, love, and direct communion, through faith and love, with their Lord and Saviour? The Apostle does not hesitate: his kindly forbearance gives way to ardent zeal; he warns both teachers and taught of their danger in burning words: he proclaims aloud, as Col. iii. 11:—"There is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all and in all." Trust in no ceremonial distinctions: speak not of their importance, lest you be found magnifying them in the place of Christ. In Him there is neither circumcision nor uncircumcision, but the keeping of the commandments of God; neither circumcision nor uncircumcision, but faith which worketh by love; neither circumcision nor uncircumcision, but a new creature. Thus the Apostle's words have their plain application from his own day. We can see, I think, that they apply to all ages, not least to our own.

Of all these expressions the most striking is the text—"Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision, but a new creature." Is there not a lesson here—a principle enunciated which will last as long as the Gospel, which has no restricted reference to the disputes of the Judaizers of St. Paul's time? The one thing wanted for all of us is a new creature. My friends, when you and I come to stand

before our Judge, and all the cares, pleasures, partisanships, and disputes of this passing life shall have been forgotten, and be as if they had never been, except in the undying effects which the feelings they have called up have left upon our souls, what is the one question which will then appear important for us? Each minister of Christ—How will the ministry of each of us be tested? Not by the beauty of the churches in which we have ministered, though this, too, may well be made subservient to the cause of Christ, by promoting that solemn reverential frame of mind which fits men better to worship with solemnity; nor yet by the eloquence with which we have preached, and the wrapped attention which we have commanded, though the power of speech is a great talent committed to us by our Saviour, to be used in His service for winning souls to Him; nor yet by what is higher still, the unhesitating expression we have given to the correct statements of the pure Gospel of Christ: not by any of these things, good as they are: still less by the accuracy or propriety of any of our ritual observances: but by this only shall our ministry be judged—whether we have so laboured to build up the souls committed to us that, through the operation of God's Holy Spirit, washed in the blood of the Redeemer, they have become new creatures; new in having their hearts and affections raised from earthly to heavenly things; new in that they have thrown off the corruption of their old nature, and become like the Lord who bought them, and who then will call them to Himself in happiness, while He commends the faithfulness of pastors who have brought them near to Him. This is the test of our ministry: does God bless us to win souls? and, if so, while we are still privileged to teach them, is this our one endeavour, the grand subject

which we insist on, that they and we must be created anew in Christ Jesus, to a life of faith, and love, and holiness? This is the test of our ministry, and the same will be the test how far you have profited by it. Are you created anew in Christ Jesus? "Not circumcision nor uncircumcision, but faith which worketh by love; neither circumcision nor uncircumcision, but a new creature."

And now we see both how St. Paul at first applied the text, and how it applies to us—teaching us not to magnify the importance of mere ceremonials, either in our opposition to them or in maintaining them; and to seek union with the Lord Jesus Christ through a new creation as the one end of all our worship. What rite could be more honourable than circumcision was for a Jew of the Apostolic age? Instituted by God Himself; hallowed by the associations of two thousand years since God gave it to the father of their race; more ancient and more venerable even than Holy Scripture, as having been instituted by God some five hundred years before Moses wrote; adopted deliberately, from the king on the throne to his lowest subject, in every pious family which had served God faithfully in all the days of all the prophets; only intermitted in those times of their nation's history when they were sunk very low; not forbidden or repealed by any command of our Saviour. Yet you see how St. Paul speaks of it, and his voice was but the echo of what all the Apostles taught. Truly we have a lesson in the way in which St. Paul speaks, and the way in which the Apostles ruled in this matter, teaching us how pure and spiritual a thing the Christian faith is, how little it is wrapped up in ordinances. These we venerate; we rejoice that God has allowed them to us as helps to our weakness. No wise

and earnest Christian makes light of any of them, even of those which have least authority, provided they foster real reverence of spiritual worship, and can be made the handmaids of real spiritual religion. But still at times all of us have need to be reminded that it is on the deep groundwork of Christianity, not on the superstructure—on the essential spirit, not on the outside—that our thoughts ought to be fixed. Both in opposing and in maintaining things non-essential there is danger lest we think too little of Christian love, faith, and all those quiet, holy graces which bespeak the presence of the new creature.

Let us earnestly pray that God will make us all more wise in the Lord Jesus Christ, more patient of each other, more really earnest for Christ's essential truth, while we become daily more forbearing as to lesser matters. Thus shall we be brought by the Holy Ghost to a nearer agreement with the spirit of St. Paul, of all the Apostles, and of their Lord.

V.—CHRISTIAN LIBERTY.

(PREACHED AT THE CONSECRATION OF THE CHURCH OF
ALL SAINTS, MARGARET STREET.)

1 COR. viii. 9.

“Take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumbling-block to them that are weak.”

ST. PAUL and his fellow Apostles had many difficult questions to deal with, from the circumstances of the Heathen and Jewish communities out of which they were forming the Church of Christ. With such questions happily we in this country now-a-days have no direct concern. Our missionaries have many of the same questions to settle still, when called to instruct their converts in what mode and degree they are to mark their separation from the superstitious or ungodly communities out of which they have been called, and how far, even in things indifferent, they are to show that they are new men, having been born again in Christ to a new life, and having altogether died to the customs and institutions of the old unchristian system in which they were reared.

How far was a Christian convert in the Apostle's days justified in taking any part in those duties of public or private life, which the custom of the heathen communities had closely intertwined with religious rites connected with the old ungodly superstition? The business and the relaxation alike of all Greek and Roman society were marked everywhere by some-

thing which spake of their connexion with the old idolatry. Was it not too strict to say, that a Christian was bound to give up at once his citizenship and intercourse with his family? And as to Jewish converts, the plea against an unbending separation was far stronger. Marks of the heathen superstition lingering in society were marks of something very like devil-worship, however beautiful and attractive. The old associations which they fostered spake of a time when all religion and morality were confounded, while men worshipped gods who were no gods. "The things which the Gentiles sacrifice," says St. Paul (1 Cor. x. 20), "they sacrifice to devils and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils. Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table and of the table of devils." But the ceremonial of Jewish society spake of the fatherly kindness of the great Lord of heaven and earth to His beloved children, and of His tender care for their souls. Every good, religious association of the Jewish people was bound up with these ceremonials. Many of these had been distinctly commanded by God, and the estimate of men's characters formed by God's inspired servants in old times had greatly depended on the zeal with which they maintained these ceremonial enactments. Many of these ceremonials also had for centuries been the outward safeguards by which morality and the religion of the heart had been fenced from the encroachments of prevailing corruption: and many of them were prophetic or symbolical allusions to great truths respecting the Messiah's kingdom. Why was a Jew, because he became a Christian, to separate himself from so many old associations full of lessons respecting God's love? Because God had given the substance

in the Gospel, was it necessary, or even right, to give up all friendly regard for the time-honoured shadow? Even heathen converts, then, might not unreasonably object to what seemed to threaten a total separation from all their duties in the family and nation in which God had placed them; and Jewish converts had a far stronger plea to keep up, for a time at least, till the first age of Christianity had passed, that easy compliance with the Jewish customs in which they had been trained, which their unconverted countrymen required of them.

But there was also another side to the picture, which spake sternly to the first Christians of the necessity for separation. Both for heathens and for Jews to be baptized into the Gospel of Jesus Christ was the profession of a new birth. Men embraced the Gospel because the Holy Ghost convinced their hearts that now Christ was come and was preached amongst them, in Him, and Him only, was there hope for their souls. They were, therefore, bound to mark their belief in this great truth in all their intercourse with those around them; and if compliance with the old customs in which they had been reared could be construed into indifference as to the distinctions between truth and falsehood, or even between the perfect and the imperfect, no sacrifice of natural tastes, or of the heart's dearest ties, or of the most cherished hopes of usefulness amongst their countrymen, was too great for Christians, when they ran the risk, by the appearance of a half-hearted compliance with what was unchristian, of dishonouring the holy Name by which they were called.

Christian Missionaries abroad, we have said, are still familiar with similar questions—questions very difficult, and

requiring in the Church the generous versatility as well as the ardent unflinching faith of St. Paul to settle them aright. Amongst ourselves at home these questions no longer occur in the old form ; yet questions very like in principle, though quite unlike in detail, meet us everywhere ; and the principles on which St. Paul practically settled these old questions for himself and his early converts are still our guides now in very changed circumstances. Read the Epistles to the Corinthians and the Epistle to the Galatians. Consider, carefully and prayerfully, how St. Paul settled the difficulty as to eating of meats that had been offered to idols, and as to his circumcising Timothy, and yet refusing to allow the circumcision of Titus. Consider the large-hearted, kindly, charitable, yielding, and yet altogether uncompromising spirit, in which he was all things to all men where the matter was indifferent, yet firm as a rock if his yielding might have been so misconstrued as to endanger souls. For example, ver. 8, immediately before our text : “ Meat commendeth us not to God : for neither, if we eat, are we the better ; neither, if we eat not, are we the worse.” And the text, “ But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumbling-block to them that are weak.” And ch. x. 27 : “ If any of them that believe not bid you to a feast, and ye be disposed to go, whatsoever is set before you, eat, asking no question for conscience sake. But if any man say unto you, This is offered in sacrifice unto idols, eat not for his sake that shewed it and for conscience sake. Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the Church of God.”—“ To the Church of God ;” this, coming last, is noted as the most important. And ver. 13 of ch. viii. : “ If meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while

the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend." It is thus St. Paul deals with questions as to the heathen ; and it is the same as to compliance with Jewish rites. Remember the remarkable passage, Acts xxi. Paul had come up to Jerusalem, with the zeal of his early training to keep the feast—the Jewish feast ; not separating himself from Jewish associations because he was a Christian apostle. The elders of the Jewish Christian Church at Jerusalem represent to him that there is danger lest his general teaching amongst the Gentiles respecting the law may be misunderstood, as if he gave too great laxity from ceremonial observance to those who were born and trained as Jews. (vv. 20, 21.) Paul, to manifest his still abiding regard for the ancient law, unites himself with certain men who had taken a vow (v. 26), purifies himself with them, and goes into the Temple. He wished all to understand that he thought it no discredit, but rather the performance of a duty, for a man who was born and reared a Jew, still to adhere from old association to the observances of his country. But when, on the other hand, it is proposed to force this law on Gentiles,—when its observance is no longer the innocent dictate of a natural religious sentiment in the peculiar people, but is represented as a binding command of God, and thus it is likely to interfere with the simplicity and freedom of the Gospel,—he denounces all such Judaizing teaching as soul-destroying error. Gal. ii. 15, 16. "We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law : for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justi-

fied." And they who insist that the observance of the law is necessary, are, in the Apostle's eyes, preaching another Gospel, which is no Gospel at all, and laying snares for souls.

From all this we see that St. Paul had one rule, though his practice might appear to vary. He had no objection to innocent liberty and the indulgence of old associations, if they did not interfere with the purity and simplicity of the Gospel. He had no objection to men following the bent of their own tastes in matters indifferent, if they did not try to force these things indifferent as commands of God upon the brethren. He would gladly show of himself in his own practice that he thought these points indifferent, as well by complying with them when he could do so in furtherance of the Gospel, as by resisting them when Christ's truth required it. Would that we, my brethren, could at all times approach similar questions in St. Paul's spirit, free from all stiff uncharitableness, yet never flinching to maintain the paramount majesty of Christ's real simple truth.

At all times, we say, somewhat similar questions force themselves upon all Christian communities. Some of these questions are very practical for individual souls. How difficult often, *e.g.*, are the questions as to worldly business and common worldly relaxation, which force themselves upon the thoughts of all! How shall I avoid morose exclusiveness, and even neglect of duties in the family and the State, and yet be ever jealous of the unsullied purity of the Christian life, which at times it would seem we might best preserve by retiring from contact with the world altogether? How shall I shape my own conduct in such matters, or give rules to those who look to me for advice? Let us strive with

prayer, when such questions vex us, to be filled with St. Paul's spirit, and then we may learn, even while we are necessarily in the world, not to be of the world.

Oh, wonderful spirit of apostolic faith and love! How kind, how generous, how charitable in its judgments of all around, yet how resolute to be true to Christ! Would to God that on all of our hearts a large measure of this spirit might descend from God the Holy Ghost; and then the young in their relaxations, the old in their business, would shed a truly Christian spirit into all they do, and win souls by their Christian kindness, while they move through the various relations in which God has placed them, ever respected for their uncompromising Christian faith and zeal, while their gentler qualities ensure them love. Such questions as to conformity with practices in which we have been reared, force themselves on our thoughts, even in our common worldly occupations, when we remember what it is to be a Christian.

But it is not only in such common matters of every-day duty that questions akin to those of the Apostolic age occur. There have, we know, been periods of the Church's history, when it has been forced, in its collective capacity, to look at questions akin to those which agitated the Apostolic days. How far is it lawful to maintain old forms of Christian worship, which have, in past times, become much mixed up with dangerous errors? At the Reformation, for example, what was the wise course—to cut down the old institutions, root and branch, from fear that they were so entangled with associations of the errors which had grown around them, that it was impossible ever to have them completely separated? This, we know, was the rule followed by some churches at the Reformation. With them, the Reformation was a stern,

unyielding struggle, which had no regard for old associations, and wished to dis sever altogether the Christians of the reformed from those of the old unreformed days. But the Church of England, partly from the necessities of its condition in that age, as arranged by God's providential care, partly from the wise design of those who conducted its movements, took another course. Our Prayer-book, our whole Ritual, speaks of a desire not rudely to shock the prejudices of any whose hearts might cling to the old forms in which they had been trained; who look upon these old forms as venerable, not only from their antiquity, but from the use which God had made of them in past times, and may make of them again. The change, at our English Reformation, was effected in a reverent, loving spirit, such as St. Paul would have approved, and yet there is no want of symptoms to show that there was present also with our Reformers, St. Paul's unflinching zeal for simple Gospel truth.

As our Reformers left the Church of England, such it has descended to us. We are taught by the formularies of the Reformation, which reverently strove, amidst the bold announcement of pure Gospel truth, still to preserve all the old customs which had not been hopelessly polluted by association with dangerous error. We shall act wisely if we adhere to our Reformers' spirit, loving, indeed, the simple outward ceremonial forms of worship, which they retained, that we may not loosen our connexion with the good and holy men who maintained Christ's truth in dark days, while superstition and ignorance were defacing it; and yet falling back also, as our dearest inheritance, on the pure and simple statements of that apostolic truth, which had been most sadly obscured, but which God, of His great mercy, caused

to shine forth anew, with fresh clearness, in the happy Reformation age.

If we are wise, I say, we shall all cling to this precious inheritance which has come to us as our fathers left it. Let no longings after a more imposing ceremonial, nor fear of too naked and unadorned a worship on the one hand, no stern zeal for simplicity on the other, tempt us to move, in this age of change, from the vantage-ground on which, under God's providence, our fathers placed us, with quite enough in our becoming forms to gratify our love of the ancient, and speak of our connexion with what was good in the pre-Reformation Church; and yet with earnest protests in every page of our Prayer-book and our Articles against those dangerous errors which, between the Apostles' time and the Reformation, had grown up and entwined themselves insidiously around Christ's precious truth.

You know well why I address to you these words. This building, which we are met to consecrate to-day, during the time of its erection has been a sort of rallying point for two sorts of persons, who have sought to exaggerate every point in its ornamental details—the one, as if the richness of its ornaments were necessarily connected with unsound doctrine and a dereliction of the pure Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ—the other, as if this beautiful and expensive adornment itself secured a holy worship, and lasting impressions of spiritual truth on wavering human souls.

My friends, I appeal to all of you this day in soberness, as you shall answer to God, to consider that the costly beauty of this house in which you worship does neither of itself secure nor endanger your Christian faith. It is simply a matter totally indifferent in itself. A Christian place of worship, as

such, is to be judged neither by the good nor the bad taste of its adornments, but simply by the purity and efficacious moral and spiritual force of that Christian teaching and Christian worship which its walls enclose. There are, of course, two sorts of minds within our pale, one of which takes great pleasure in such costly ornaments as now surround us; another which finds them no help to its earnest aspirations after spiritual truth. The latter class are not likely to be found often amongst the worshippers in this place. To the former I would say, while you thankfully acknowledge the munificence with which this church has been prepared to suit your peculiar tastes, be very careful that in all your worship here you surround yourselves, through the Lord Jesus Christ's help, with a beauty far above that of outward adornment—the beauty of a pure Gospel faith, and a simple earnest Christian life. I truly believe, my friends, that in these days, both amongst High Church and Low Church, there are persons who are tired of the miserable controversies that have long divided Christendom, who simply desire, while using the liberty allowed them, to follow their own tastes in things indifferent, to worship the Lord Jesus Christ faithfully, and follow Him in their lives. God grant that the church opened this day may be no cause of fresh dissensions, but a fresh help to those whose tastes it gratifies, to serve the Lord faithfully according to the form they love.

The Church of England certainly allows to its children a liberty both in doctrine and ceremonial beyond any other Church. I believe this liberty is allowed wisely. A national Church, in an inquiring age, very sensitive as to the rights of individual liberty, must not strive to bind its children by any fetters which are not either of God's direct imposing, or required

by the necessities of His providential care. For my own part, I greatly desire that all might agree with myself in loving a very simple ritual; and when they undertake self-denying works for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, in doing this work in the very simplest and least eccentric form. But if there be minds which love those very forms in things indifferent which I dislike, and yet love God and Christ far more, I dare not seek to make my own tastes the measure of the Church's liberty. Only, my friends, take heed lest by any means this liberty become a stumbling-block either to your own or your fellow-Christian's weakness. Beware for others, lest your good be evil spoken of, while those amongst whom you dwell, learn, from any eccentricities in your life or teaching, to think that you prize your own mode of apprehending the Gospel, above the Gospel itself. And beware for yourselves, lest, from accustoming your minds to dwell upon outward forms and ceremonies, you come to think them of more importance than spiritual truths—lest, loving things ancient, you come to think that they are good because they are old, forgetting that, in a world which is ever circling round and round, the greatest of all novelties is the unauthorised reproduction of old errors. Beware also, lest in your zeal for antiquity you be not ancient enough, going back to the wavering followers of the Apostles, and not to the Apostles themselves. Alas! the age in which we live has produced miserable examples of very many persons trained in the pure Gospel teaching of our apostolic Church, led away by excited feeling, some in the vigour of health, some in the languor of sickness and approaching dissolution, to a miserable worship of human saints and of the Lord's human mother, into which in their sober moments they would

not have believed they could ever fall. God grant that those who teach and those who worship in this church may be ever kept by the Spirit of God safe from all such delusions, that their abundant labours of self-denying love may never be tainted by an unscriptural dependence upon human ministrations or human additions to the Word of God. My friends, however different be our opinions, there is a great and abundant work before all of us, to labour heartily, simply, and prayerfully in the midst of a world and a town lying in wickedness, to advance the kingdom of Him who died to save our poor erring souls. God grant all of us to labour heartily and faithfully, and in a loving spirit, as in the sight of the Lord Jesus Christ!

VI.—CONVICTION OF SIN.



PSALM li. 1.

“Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving-kindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions.”

THERE can be no reasonable doubt that this 51st Psalm is a Psalm of David. It has probably been placed after the 50th, inscribed a Psalm not of David but of Asaph, because they both set forth the insufficiency of all mere outward sacrifice or ceremonial purification to do away with sin. Thus the 50th, v. 8:—“I will not reprove thee for thy sacrifices, or thy burnt-offerings.” 9. “I will take no bullock out of thy house, nor he-goats out of thy folds.” 14. “Offer unto God thanksgiving; and pay thy vows unto the Most High.”

The 51st, v. 16:—“Thou desirest not sacrifice, else would I give it; thou delightest not in burnt-offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.”

Neither can there be any doubt that the occasion of the composition of this Psalm is rightly pointed out in the superscription. It is called ‘A Psalm of David, when Nathan the Prophet came unto him after he had gone in to Bathsheba.’ This is a strange incident in David’s life, his sin in the matter

of Bathsheba and Uriah. We must recall the circumstances that we may understand this Psalm.

There is nothing more alarming than when we hear in our ordinary life of some one who has long been known as a faithful servant of God falling into some dreadful sin. Such instances certainly do occur, and no one can have lived long without knowing such. They strike us with horror, suggesting the wretched alternative, either that the man whom we have so long esteemed has been a mere hypocrite playing a part by which he deceived both himself and us with an outside show of faith and goodness, while his heart was unchanged—or else that those who have once known God in Christ, and loved Him, and been sustained by His Holy Spirit, may at some unexpected moment of temptation forfeit all their heavenly privileges; and we think, if such men fall so miserably, who can be safe? My friends, no one can be safe even for a moment, however long he may have served God, or however truly he may have loved Him, unless he waits upon Him in daily humble dependence, watching the issues of his heart and praying God daily to cleanse them, feeling that without God he cannot for a moment stand. Christians in this day, as much as the servants of God under the old covenant, are in danger of what is called in the Prophets settling on their lees—falling, that is, into an easy, self-indulgent way of living, in which they think a great deal more of the good things God has given them than of God. When a Christian is prosperous in his worldly affairs, let him remember that this is a time of great danger for his soul. It is when riches increase that the heart is most apt to be set upon them. It is in our easy, comfortable days that our hearts begin to think, even without knowing it, that we can

do without God. It is well for us to have seasons when we are called to self-examination and self-restraint.

Now David's prosperity had been very great. God had raised him from a shepherd boy to be a powerful king. He had known very many hardships while he was an outcast and a wanderer for many years, but now God had given him rest. The seventh chapter of the second book of Samuel marks the point in David's life when his prosperity was at its height; and nothing can be more beautiful than the picture set before us in that chapter of the humble faithful praying spirit in which he referred all his prosperity to its proper source, thinking little of himself, and much of God. Nathan was his adviser as to how he should best show his gratitude, as he sat in his house and rejoiced because God had given him rest from all his enemies. And now but a very short time has passed, and prosperity has done its work in undermining the faithful sense of God's continual power, which the rough storms of years of conflict could not shake. David, at his ease, walks upon the roof of that same house of cedar which he had a short time before been ashamed to inhabit as too good for him; and his eye and his heart wander carelessly on dangerous temptations, and he does not make haste to withstand them, lest his soul be enticed. And when the same Nathan is next introduced to us, it is as warning the fallen king, driving sharp rebuke home to his conscience for the adultery and murder which he had deliberately committed, and which, strange to say, he quietly slumbered over for the space of nearly a whole year.

The man after God's own heart had fallen most grievously. As he had allowed his heart to become possessed by the desire of wicked pleasures, they had utterly intoxicated him.

He became an adulterer, and then, like a hypocrite, thought how he was to save his character from the exposure which his sin deserved. When one device failed by which he sought to shield himself, he turned to another; and when, from Uriah's perseverance, that too failed, resolved to compass his object by any means, he did not hesitate to give orders for a cold-blooded murder. And months followed each other, and the year wore on, and his conscience still slumbered.

As Calvin has pointed out, we are not to suppose that all this time David lived without any thought of God. Doubtless he acknowledged Him in general terms as the Judge of the world, and prayed to Him daily, and not only did exercise himself in His worship, but also endeavoured to have his life and behaviour conformed to the prescriptions of the law. Nay, the way in which he received Nathan's parable of the ewe-lamb, and expressed his indignation against the supposed offender, and declared his intention to punish him with the greatest severity, showed that, strange to say, he regarded himself as one who lived so far by the rules of righteousness, that he was entitled to put them in force sternly for the punishment of others. His conscience as to his own monstrous sin was lulled into complete security—a miserable instance of the power of sin to blind the eyes of the soul. The ardent faith of his former years had now given way to a cold formalism, which was very strict in its judgment of other people's sins, but very indulgent of its own. The man on whom the Spirit of God had come down in former times so richly, seemed now in full career to be given up to the Spirit of Evil. It now seemed probable that his conscience would slumber on till the day of returning grace had passed, and that he would never wake till the dread voice of the

Judge summoned him after death to receive his punishment—a miserable prospect for one whose earlier years had been so full of great and bright promises.

It is right that we should dwell on the risk which David's soul at this time ran. We are apt to look upon the inspired men of the Bible history too much as mere instruments for making known to us God's will, without considering that they had each his own fearful struggles, while the conflict was still being fought out, on their victory in which their hopes of their souls' salvation hung. David's soul was doubtless at this time in great peril; and had it not been for God's great mercy in sending Nathan now to rescue him, notwithstanding all his good beginnings and all his past faithfulness he must have perished.

But God would not leave his servant in the way of death which he had chosen without a solemn warning. 2 Sam. xii. sets before us Nathan's interview with him, the parable of the ewe-lamb, the pointed declaration by which the prophet smote his conscience—"Thou art the man"—and the denunciation of God's vengeance, by which he was at last mercifully startled from his miserable slumber. "And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord."

The account of David's repentance in this chapter passes in few words; so few, that, though we read of his deep distress and anguish while his child was dying, we still scarcely realise what his repentance was. It seems to pass lightly in the words of the 13th verse: "David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord. And Nathan said unto David, The Lord also hath put away thy sin." We could scarcely understand from the chapter how deep and poignant was the sorrow which the conviction of his sin caused, and how violent

the struggle which shook his whole soul, before he could appropriate the consolatory words in which Nathan told him that his sin would be forgiven. But this 51st Psalm sets the whole before us in its true light. To compare this 51st Psalm with the twelfth chapter of second Samuel, is very needful for the understanding of what true repentance is. It is common for worldly men in the present day to think that Christianity is a very easy religion: that a man has only to say, in general terms, "I have sinned against the Lord," and immediately he can appropriate to himself the comforting reflection—"The Lord also hath put away thy sin." But if a man's heart is truly awakened by the holy Spirit of God, and starts from the slumber into which worldliness and formalism had lulled it (and without being so awakened it cannot be a partaker of the mercy purchased by the Lord Jesus Christ), its conviction of sin is no light matter. It feels sin to be very oppressive; and even while it most trusts in God's mercy through Christ, it feels most what a burden and pollution sin is, and longs to be thoroughly delivered from it. Brethren, the feelings of the 51st Psalm must be realised in each of our own hearts. We have not sinned like David, but we have each of us sinned very deeply. Our sins deserve God's wrath and curse, and we cannot appropriate the promises of forgiveness in Christ without hearty repentance.

Let us then look carefully through this 51st Psalm, that we may understand what were David's feelings, and what ought in their degree to be our own. This 51st Psalm is to be compared with the 32nd. The 32nd looks back upon the same struggle through which David was passing at the time

he gave utterance to the 51st. Thus v. 3 of the 32nd: "When I kept silence, my bones waxed old: through my roaring all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture was turned into the drought of summer. I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sins." And v. 1: "Blessed is the man whose transgression is forgiven, and whose sin is covered."

Now turn to the 51st Psalm. There are, it has been said, two parts in evangelical repentance, a conviction of sin and a conviction of grace. Both are present in this Psalm.

The first at v. 3: "I acknowledge my transgression; and my sin is ever before me." v. 5: "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me." v. 14: "Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God."

The second is shown by the very prayers for mercy: they are uttered with the fervour of one who knows that mercy is not impossible. David's faith had not utterly departed from him, though his sin had been so great, and the time of his dull insensibility so long. His sinful state had been like that of St. Peter, not like that of Judas. St. Peter, though he sinned greatly in denying Christ, never lost his conviction of His mercy. Our Lord's look made him weep bitterly. Here was conviction of sin. And again, he was one of the first to run to Christ's tomb on the morning of the resurrection, and at the Lake of Tiberias he cast himself into the sea and swam to shore, that he might not be behind any in hastening to his Lord. Here was conviction of Christ's merciful readiness to receive the penitent. But Judas was estranged from Christ;

he had lost all conviction of His mercy when he felt the anguish of his sin. Thus his repentance was despair, and he died without Christ by his own hand, the last act of despair and unfaithfulness. All through this Psalm there are proofs that Nathan's declaration of God's readiness to forgive was believed by David; not only in the earnestness of prayer which runs through the whole of it, speaking everywhere of God as ready to pardon and to purify; but, in the 1st verse, in the mention of God's loving-kindness: "According to thy loving-kindness; according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies." The sinner knows that he has to do with a merciful and gracious Father. And in the 17th verse: "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise."

Here then is the model of unfeigned repentance. We have the two essential parts of evangelical repentance. The soul's deep conviction of sin is not separated from its conviction of God's great mercy. Truly it is because he has offended so merciful a Father and Saviour that the faithful Christian feels his sin the more. If our repentance is real, it will want neither of these marks. A real belief that God in Christ is all merciful will not allow us to forget that He abhors sin, and that we are very sinful.

And now look to some particular points in David's utterance of these convictions. It has been noted, and not perhaps fancifully, that in the first verse David does not venture to say "My God," but "Have mercy upon me, O God!" The sinner here, like the publican in the parable, stands at first afar off, and smites upon his breast, and says, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" He knows indeed that God is all-merciful; but sin has separated him from God: he is longing for

reconciliation, but he does not venture to speak yet as one reconciled.

Again, when David says, in v. 4, "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight," it is noted that he seems to lose sight of his injury to his neighbour in his rebellion against God. It is the thought of sin as committed against God that gives it its chief heinousness. And this perhaps is one great point in which the view of sin taken by the world, and the view taken by the faithful, differ. The world is in its best mood indignant with sin, but only as an injury to our fellow-men; the truly repentant heart sees its chief heinousness to consist in its being committed against the God of holiness and love.

Not that the offence against our neighbour appears less in this point of view. Far from it: it appears greater. David had caused Uriah to be murdered; and now in the murdered man he sees the image of God. Christ tells us how at the last day He will set before the wicked that every act of unkindness to the least of His brethren has been done to Him. And this will be no diminution but does greatly aggravate the heinousness of their unkind acts. So here, in the murdered Uriah, David sees the image of God, of that kind and merciful Father who had led him from his earliest youth, and stood by him in so many dangers, and given him all his prosperity. It is thus that an awakened soul understands that God is injured in every injury to His creatures. As love of God implies love of our neighbour, so to injure our neighbour is to injure God. My friends, it is so with our least as with our greatest sins: they are injurious to God; they crucify the Son of God afresh. When we hurt a human soul, we hurt Him who died for it.

And note here that this thought, which gives an additional sting to the bitterness of sin, is mercifully arranged also to give surer consolation. David could not make amends to Uriah. He had long been in his bloody grave; and if it was only by making amends to him that pardon could be obtained, pardon was impossible. David's tears could not raise Uriah to life again, nor restore her purity to Bathsheba. How bitter is this thought that our sins against our brethren once committed are eternal in their consequence! Shall not this make us pause before we sin? This never-ending effect of sin is not confined to such sins as adultery or murder; the impure word once gone from us sheds impurity on our brother's soul, and we never can recall it. Long after we are deeply penitent, the sin from the punishment of which God's mercy has saved us may be doing its work for eternity in the ruin of our brother.

Uriah had died in battle, with very little time for thought. A few days before, through David's cowardly device, he was tempted and misled to drunkenness. If he was hurried to the presence of God with all his sins fresh and unrepented of, how could David make atonement to his God for this never-dying injury? Well may the sinner cry out, as in v. 11, when he thinks what effects his sins work, "Cast me not away from thy presence, and take not thy Holy Spirit from me:" for our sin indeed deserves that we should be utterly cast away.

Again note that in the 5th verse David passes from one particular sin to the acknowledgment of his all-pervading sinfulness: "I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me." We need not suppose this to be urged as any excuse; far from it: rather, his conscience being awakened to

the heinousness of this one sin, David sees that his whole nature is sinful and his life full of sin. A man may be well satisfied with his good deeds while he has no deep conviction of sin; but let him truly understand what a miserable sinner he has been in any one particular, and he will learn to see even his best deeds in their true worthlessness, and to acknowledge how sin goes through his whole nature. None of us can repent truly of one sin without learning that we are altogether sinners; for a conviction of the heinousness of any one sin makes us keen-sighted to detect many sins where before we were quietly self-satisfied.

One more point in David's confession of sin, and we close. The Psalm is entitled 'A Psalm to the Chief Musician.' It contains, doubtless, the outpourings of David's feelings as they gushed forth at first in his hours of solitary humiliation; but afterwards he deliberately committed them to writing, and he gave them to the chief musician to be preserved and made public, that, as the Church and nation had been scandalized by his open sin, so they might be witnesses of his deep repentance. He has told us, in Psalm xxxii., that when he kept silence he consumed away, but now he will keep silence no longer. In v. 13 he says, "I will teach transgressors thy ways, and sinners shall be converted unto thee." David was chief in the state, and looked up to by the whole Church also; therefore the effect of his miserable example must have been like a wide-spreading pestilence; but then let no one of us think that he can sin, however humble be his station, however he may seek to sin secretly, without injuring many by his bad example: David sought to hide his sin of adultery by the wicked devices which accompanied it. But let no man, high or low, think that he can sin without spreading the disease

of sin around him ; and our repentance must make amends, so far as is possible, to all those whom we have injured. We never can do so much good by our repentance as evil by our sin ; but it is the least we can do to warn all other sinners from the wretchedness which has well nigh overwhelmed ourselves.

From David's sin and repentance thus set before us in this Psalm (and in the Lesson for last Sunday morning, 2 Sam. xii.), we may learn these few out of many lessons. But let no one dwell on the flattering thought that he is free from such dreadful sins as thus endangered David's soul : it is not the particular nature of our sin, but its reality, and its keeping us estranged from God and Christ, that will make it ruin us. Which of us shall not dread temptation, and feel our utter insufficiency to stand without our Lord and Saviour holding us up one by one ? The heinousness of David's sin is at once a warning and a comfort—a warning lest any should be self-confident—a comfort lest any should despair. And the Psalm teaches also both how heinous a thing all sin is, and how deep is the true repentance of a faithful heart. If we are real disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, we shall be led each of us by the thought of our sins to understand our need of a Saviour ; and the thought of what our Saviour has done to redeem us will make us more to loathe our sin, and strive more earnestly to resist it.

VII.—THE NEW BIRTH.

ST. JOHN iii. 7, 8.

“Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.

“The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth : so is every one that is born of the Spirit.”

THIS discourse of the Lord with Nicodemus stands to the Sacrament of Baptism much in the same relation in which the discourse on the bread of life (in the 6th chapter of St. John) stands to the Lord's Supper. But it would be a misconception both of the one discourse and of the other to suppose the Lord's words limited in their meaning to either sacrament. Will any man affirm that our Lord's warning to Nicodemus means nothing more than “Ye must be baptized,” or the solemn words now referred to of the 6th chapter nothing more than “Ye must receive the Lord's Supper”? No one will so interpret either discourse who knows anything of the force and depth of the Word of God. Consider what Christ says at the end of his discourse on the bread of life in the 63rd verse of the 6th chapter:—“It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing; the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life.” This may be applied quite as much to the interpretation of the discourse with Nicodemus as to that in the 6th chapter on the bread that came down from heaven. Do we say, then, that the two discourses have no connection with the two

sacraments—the one with the Lord's Supper, the other with baptism? Far otherwise. Each has reference to its own sacrament, though neither has its fulfilment in the ordinance to which it thus has reference. But we must confine ourselves to the discourse now before us, which is so suitable for this holy day.*

Nicodemus, a Rabbi, a master of Israel, had come to our Lord disposed, though with hesitation, to allow His claims to be, if not the Christ, at least a heavenly teacher. The man, there can be no doubt from the whole tone of the discourse, thinks highly of his own descent from Abraham, and has been in the habit, rightly and naturally enough, of making a marked distinction between persons like himself, who enjoy great covenant privileges, and the heathen who can only be brought into a state of salvation by being converted and becoming proselytes, undergoing a total change—a change so complete that the Rabbis were in the habit of calling it a new birth. It was obviously, Nicodemus would have allowed, a new birth for a heathen when he was rescued from the service of devils and made to know and adore the great Jehovah. Now our Lord understood Nicodemus's heart. He was of a timid character, as is generally supposed to be shown from his coming to Christ by night. If Jesus could make good his claim, he was prepared, as a Jewish teacher, to recognise in Him the Jewish Messiah; but he had no thought of taking such a step as himself to become a proselyte to a new religion. In his own case it was no complete change that he was prepared for, such as he knew to be requisite for a heathen entering the Church of God; he was looking merely for a gradual improvement and opening up of the

* Preached on Whit-Sunday.

system under which he felt a natural pride in having been born. For himself, if he could only have his scruples and hesitation removed, he would gladly follow the heavenly Teacher who seemed likely to lead him and his brethren to fresh blessings in the system to which they had been long trained. Such was, in all probability, Nicodemus's view of what lay before him if he acknowledged and followed Christ. No wonder, then, that he marvelled at the first words which our Lord addressed to him, in the 3rd verse—"Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." What can the words mean addressed to an inheritor of ancient privileges—a believer in the true God, circumcised in infancy on the eighth day, and accustomed all his life long to a regular attendance upon ordinances—a man, too, conscientiously disposed to walk as God commanded? The words would be suitable enough spoken to a lost heathen; but what can they mean for a master in Israel? We read, v. 4, "Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?"

Our Lord's answer repeats and enforces the startling words showing that the new birth He spake of implied a purification of the soul by a spiritual power, and that this purification would be naturally expressed by the symbol of an outward washing, since it was to be accompanied by a washing of the soul from the stains of sin—such a washing of the soul as the Jews were continually in the habit of typifying by the baptisms already common amongst them.—v. 5: "Verily, verily, I say unto thee," says Christ, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." Nicodemus, the strict and zealous Jew, like the most

despised of the Gentiles, if he would enter the kingdom of God, must be born again of water and the Spirit. How was Nicodemus, our Lord would seem to ask, as a master of Israel, in the habit of interpreting such passages in the Old Testament as that of Ezekiel xxxvi. 25? — “I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean; from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you.” Was not this a prophecy of the cleansing of God’s people to be accomplished when the days of the Messiah were come? How could any man, however pure his descent from Abraham—however great his knowledge and upright his life—however strict his observance of ordinances—hope to be admitted into that holy kingdom without this spiritual washing? v. 5: “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” No outward purity of descent, giving a title to covenant privileges, would avail. v. 6: “That which is born of the flesh” (however good of its kind) “is flesh” (and flesh only); “and that which is born of the Spirit” (that only which is born of the Spirit) “is spirit;” and “mine,” says Christ, “is a spiritual kingdom.” “Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.”

Did Nicodemus ask how could this be? How a soul could be so changed, when it did not even perceive its need of changing, and be so completely changed that the transforming process was to be rightly likened to a new birth, a new creation? Our Lord refers him, in the 8th verse, to the unseen but

almighty influences of the Spirit of God. Think not, He seems to say, of powers outwardly visible alone. Even in nature you know the overwhelming power of the unseen winds: how they bear down any obstacle; how, unseen as they are, they level far-extended forests and scatter mightiest navies, or bear them safe to the haven where they would be. The powers thou canst not see are the greatest of all powers, and no changes are greater than those they work. So, if thou art willing to enter into my spiritual kingdom, a spiritual power must change and re-create thy heart. v. 7: "Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit."

Thus, looking to the whole connection and bearing of the passage before us, no one can maintain that what our Lord says in this discourse means merely thou must be baptized. What need would there have been of such mysterious language for a thing so simple? Hundreds of Jews had been baptized by John in Jordan. A Jew would not object to be baptized, and would express no astonishment at being urged to be baptized, for the outward rite of ancient washings was already a common symbol of a desire to cast off the impurities of sin and obtain greater holiness. The words addressed to Nicodemus mean evidently something quite new to him—Thou must be born again, Thou must be afresh created, The Spirit of God must breathe life into thy dead soul. And so must it be with every one that would enter into my spiritual kingdom. This seems the obvious meaning of our Lord's words.

But are we then to say, because the idea of baptism does not answer to the fulness of the meaning of this discourse, that therefore the words have no connection with this sacrament? Christian baptism is something very different from the ceremonial washings of the Jews, and from the baptism of John—the baptism of Repentance. It is spoken of very highly in many passages of Scripture, and is intimately connected with the new birth in Titus iii. 15, where the washing of regeneration or the regenerating laver or bath points to baptism. “Not by works of righteousness, but according to his mercy he saved us by the washing [or laver] of regeneration [the regenerating bath], and the renewing of the Holy Ghost.” And again, 1 Peter iii. 21, “Baptism doth also now save us; not the putting away the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience towards God.” These passages, with our text, show that baptism is never to be treated lightly, as if it were an unimportant ordinance; it is the sacrament of our regeneration—the outward sign ordained by Christ Himself to typify a new birth, and to seal the blessings of this birth for the faithful. Even for infants, who cannot have faith, it is the rightly-appointed instrument of their admission into Christ’s Church, and to all the spiritual privileges by which Christ affects men’s souls in His Church, through the teaching of the Word, and a thousand other holy influences. .

The sacrament of baptism, then, is spoken of with great reverence throughout the whole of the New Testament, being brought more prominently forward even than the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper; and in the two discourses of the 6th and 3rd chapters of St. John it is not possible to explain Christ’s words naturally, without supposing an allusion in

each to one of these sacraments: vi. 55 says—"My flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed: he that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me and I in him." And the 3rd ch. 5th v. says—"Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." No doubt, in both these passages, it is not without design that the spiritual blessing is spoken of in words so naturally recalling the outward rite, which, by Christ's ordinance, is the type of it, and the seal or assurance of its possession to the faithful soul. Water, representing the Holy Ghost in its cleansing power, and the bread and wine, representing the food that came down from heaven, the body and blood of Christ, in its sustaining power, are not without evident design brought to our minds by our Lord's words in these two discourses. Manifestly, the outward rite in each case is to be prized for its connection with the spiritual blessing. It is a solemn thought that we are baptized Christians, and that therefore it is our own fault if our souls are not in Christ's Church the subjects daily of the Holy Spirit's cleansing influence. It is a solemn thing to be partakers of the bread and wine in the Lord's Supper, and thereby to profess that our souls are sustained by the body and blood of Christ. And if we wish to enter into the full spiritual meaning of either ordinance, we cannot do better than study the discourse in St. John, in which each is alluded to in such immediate connection with, and subserviency to, the deep spiritual truths and blessings which it typifies.

Let us then take the words of our text, allowing their connection with baptism, but not exaggerating it, and not flattering our souls with the delusive hope that, because we have been baptized, therefore the Lord's warning to Nico-

demus has no application to our case. "Except a man be born again, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." His heart tells each man of earnest soul that these words speak not of a rite only to which he was submitted in unconscious infancy, however highly the rite is to be prized because connected with spiritual blessing as one of Christ's sacraments, but of a great and lasting spiritual change. The words proclaim to each man of earnest soul that the holy Spirit of God must make him who is to be saved that which he cannot be by nature. No figure can be stronger to denote a change than this of a new birth, unless it be that other of 2 Cor. v. 17, a new creature: "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature, a new creation."

The greatness of the change, then, is the point which an earnest soul will dwell on, not the disputes as to when this change begins, or the steps by which it grows. The change here spoken of is wrought by the Spirit of God, and the 2nd verse of the text tells us how unperceived this change may both come at first and grow. "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit." Do not these words warn us to abstain from prying into any subtle questions as to the exact mode and times of the Spirit's operation in maturing the new birth—the new creation?

Some Christians grow from very early childhood, by the grace of God, in the gradual attainment of all spiritual blessings; others, failing utterly to fulfil the promise of their baptism in early life, wandering far from God's favour and falling into grievous sin, are suddenly arrested in their later days in the career that leads to death, and are brought

humbled to their Saviour after many years of wickedness. Then they are filled with deep feelings of repentance. New thoughts, desires, and resolutions grow within them by the Holy Spirit's influence, and all who were acquainted with them in their careless days confess that they have become new men. But however the change may come, early or late, gradually or more suddenly, unperceived from infancy or in mature life, it is certainly a complete change from the state in which they were born as Adam's lost children. And, moreover, it is not only that, in rising from their natural lost state, they have undergone a change of privileges, such as every baptized member of Christ's Church, trained as his baptism directs, is introduced to. They have undergone a change of heart and feeling. To the natural heart of man the thought of God and Christ is not pleasant. The natural heart rather shuns such thoughts. The thought of sin is not odious to it. It has no feeling of deep humiliation on account of sin. It has indeed no dislike of sin, except perhaps on account of its inconvenient consequences; hence it has no earnest desire of a Saviour, and moreover it does not love God's people. Worldliness and pleasure have all its best affections. This is the natural state. But the renewed heart is quite different. It loves the true servants of Christ, and feels great sympathy with them; it cannot but love them, for it loves Him whom they serve, who has redeemed them: it has a horror of sin, even when sin is most gilded over, and most praised by the world's false tongue. It feels that its own sin is so great that it cannot live without the thought of a merciful Redeemer to take away its sin. It receives a real pleasure from holding communion with the Redeemer and with the Father through Him in prayer.

To the renewed heart all these feelings are not words and phrases, but the deepest and truest realities of its being. And this great change is wrought by an unseen almighty power from heaven. All this ought to be brought to our minds while we read the text—"Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again."

Brethren, while we read this discourse with Nicodemus, the question is forced upon each of us, Have we undergone this great change? No privileges will save us unless our hearts are changed. This is the object which God has had in view in mercifully offering us all our baptismal privileges, that through the blessings they impart we might become conformed to His image. This question, more than any other, greatly concerns our hopes of salvation. Unless we are changed from our natural state, though surrounded by a thousand privileges freely offered, we are deliberately rejecting them. Unless we are changed, these privileges have never gained admission to our hearts. We are still without God. For if they have reached our hearts they must by the almighty power of God's Spirit have changed us from careless sin and the service of the world to earnest faith in Christ, an earnest desire of God's favour, and an earnest longing after holiness.

VIII.—CHRIST LIFTED UP.



ST. JOHN iii. 14, 15.

“As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up ;

“That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.”

CONSIDER how these words occur. The first part of the discourse with Nicodemus had reference to the spiritual birth, the complete change which the soul must undergo before it can enter into the kingdom of God. When Nicodemus showed that he could not comprehend the simple primary truth as to the necessity of this change, the Lord said to him (verse 10), “Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen, and ye receive not our witness. If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe if I tell you of heavenly things? And no man hath ascended up to heaven but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of Man which *is* in heaven.” The Lord goes on from what He calls earthly things—amongst which He classes the necessity for this change of heart—to hint, not obscurely, at some of those mysterious heavenly doctrines which give its peculiar character to Christianity. First, the union of the Godhead and the manhood in His person in verse 13: “No man hath ascended up to heaven but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of Man

which is in heaven." And, secondly, in the text, the atoning efficacy of his death: "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life."

Such statements of the great distinguishing doctrines of the Gospel, made by our Lord himself, are much to be noted. There seems a peculiar charm in having these doctrines set before us in His own words, quite irrespectively of any of the phrases derived from the controversies which have grown up around them in the many ages of the Church's history. At the time the Lord spake as in the text, even the Apostles themselves did not comprehend these doctrines. It was not till the coming down of the Holy Spirit, after His ascension, that the Apostles received a full understanding of such mysteries. It is most interesting, therefore, to note the form in which He himself clothed the doctrines while He was still preaching in His human guise on earth. Now, the words He uses in such statements are so far explicit, that we, having the further elucidation of them supplied by His death and resurrection, can now have no hesitation as to their meaning; yet have they that degree of obscurity which, before the full development of the events that followed, must have made them rather excite in those who heard them a degree of wondering awe as to the mysterious person who spake them, than convey a complete apprehension of His meaning. It is interesting to observe how our Lord gave out these doctrines at first somewhat obscurely, till the appointed time of full knowledge arrived. But to us now there is little that is obscure, even in the darkest of His sayings on such subjects.

The Lord seems, at this first interview, to have wished to set the mind of Nicodemus at work, that he might learn, partly at once, and partly gradually from the events which followed, how different the Gospel was from any system of human teaching, and even from that law of the Jewish religion in which he had been reared, and on which he seems to have thought Christ's teaching might easily be engrafted. No doubt the Old Testament contained the germ which was to grow into the Gospel; but the Jewish expositors of the ancient volume in Nicodemus's day were little aware of all that it contained; nor, indeed, could any human being know its full meaning till Christ came to teach them. Therefore, in the discourse of the 3rd chapter of St. John, the Lord's address to this man contained what were to him undoubtedly very unexpected and startling statements. He said to him—

1st. My religion is a spiritual religion, and the privileges I offer can only be received and enjoyed by those who, having been changed from their natural state of heart, have become spiritually minded.

2nd. My religion is, in its fulness, such as can only be taught by one who, though showing himself in the form of man, is the eternal Son of God.

These two points we find in the earlier part of the discourse, and then he adds, 3rdly, in our text,—As the grand object of my religion is to save man from the misery in which he lies mortally sick, and to bring God and man once more together, this is only to be accomplished by the Son of Man, who is also the Son of God, becoming, in some mysterious way, the object of adoration to which the longing eyes of perishing sinners shall be directed. This shall come to pass by the Son of Man being lifted up (a notable expression); and they

who are thus led to believe in Him shall be cured of all their soul's sickness, and become partakers of life eternal. And this, the Lord seems to say to Nicodemus, is shadowed forth even in historical parts of your Old Scriptures. All of this enters into the full meaning of the words of the text.

There was enough here to set Nicodemus's mind at work. He could never forget the impression which such statements made on him. No wonder that we find him (John vii. 50) resisting the mad counsels of the rulers, who set Jesus at nought because he came from Galilee (verse 52): "Nicodemus saith unto them (*i.e.* both the chief priests and Pharisees)—Nicodemus, the same that came to Jesus by night, being one of them,—Doth our law judge any man before it hear him and know what he doeth? They answered and said unto him, Art thou also of Galilee? Search and look, for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet." This is what we learn of the impression made on Nicodemus from the 7th chapter. And no wonder, also, as events went on, and Nicodemus saw the mysterious Teacher whom he learned daily more to honour, so exposed to public view in His ignominious punishment, as seemed to answer to the raising up which had been spoken of at their first interview, that we should find him (John xix. 39) following the Lord with affectionate reverence to the grave: "Then came also Nicodemus, which at the first came to Jesus by night, and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about an hundred pound weight. Then took they the body of Jesus, and wound it in linen clothes, with the spices, as the manner of the Jews is to bury."

We have here an example of the way in which the Lord's words lay hold of the heart and conscience. The words were scarcely understood at first, but they could not be

dismissed from the memory. Nicodemus had come at first to visit Christ by night secretly, doubtless for fear of the Jews. We find him growing bolder to oppose the chief priests in what we have read from the seventh chapter. In what we have read from the nineteenth, both he and Joseph of Arimathea—of whom we are told that he also was a disciple, but secretly, for fear of the Jews—seem to have cast their fears aside, when they dared to honour in His death Him whom at first they had scarcely spirit to follow openly while living. It is thus that the words of Christ work. The Lord's words, my friends, are not less powerful now: they are even more powerful; for their force is now clearly manifest from the first, and not shrouded any longer by the veil which hung over their meaning before the Gospel scheme was fully developed. Shall we not believe that many a trembling, half-hearted follower of Christ has His holy words ever recurring to his memory, and dwells on them in secret, and by the Holy Spirit's teaching is made to understand and love them, and comes, like Nicodemus, at last to cast off his fears, and, learning to adore the Son of Man lifted up on the cross, and to believe on Him to eternal life, takes Christ's side openly, in spite of all scorn or violent opposition? God grant us all so to be taught of the Holy Spirit to dwell on the Lord's words and profit by them! They were spoken at first, and have been recorded, for the saving of our souls.

And now let us examine carefully what the Lord declared of Himself in the exact words of the text. This is the Lord Jesus Christ's own account of Himself:—"As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.'

The incident in Jewish history to which the Lord refers is described in the 21st chapter of the Book of Numbers:—v. 5. “The people spake against God and against Moses, Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt, to die in the wilderness? And the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died. Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord and against thee; pray unto the Lord that he take away the serpents from us. And Moses prayed for the people. And the Lord said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live. And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole: and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass he lived.”

The memory of what is here described remained very long amongst the Jewish people. What we here read refers to the history of the year 1450, or thereabouts, before Christ. In the 2nd Book of Kings, ch. 18, v. 4, we read how, when King Hezekiah, some seven hundred years afterwards, in his zeal against idolatry, removed the high places and cut down the groves, amongst the rites which called forth his wrath was the adoration paid to this very image:—“He (Hezekiah) brake in pieces the brazen serpent that Moses had made; for unto those days the children of Israel did burn incense to it.” So easily do those means which God has employed in old times for communicating blessings to His people—whether they be faithful men, or sacred places, or any other instruments of good—come in degenerate days to be looked upon with superstitious reverence, and to be set up in rivalry against

the pure worship of Him from whom alone they derived all their power. We may note in passing that the history of the brazen serpent turned into an idol teaches a lesson for the Christian Church. But the reason why we quote this incident from the Book of Kings now is to show how deeply the memory of this deliverance, through the lifting up of the serpent in the wilderness, was fixed in the memory and traditions of the nation; and how natural, therefore, it was for the Lord to refer to it when reasoning with a Jewish teacher.

And the Lord pointed out that this serpent, which in old days had been perverted to idolatry, might be naturally made a type of His own life-giving power through His death—a type—that is, an outward image supplied by some event or person in the old history, which may be taken to illustrate a spiritual truth. It is not necessarily contended that the events were made to happen, or the fate and characters of the persons mentioned in history overruled by God, with the distinct object of their supplying these types. They may be merely selected arbitrarily by those who, in after ages, wish to illustrate certain new truths: as St. Paul, *e. g.*, in the well-known passage in the 4th chapter of the Epistle to the Galatians, compares the bondwoman Hagar to the Jewish, and Sarah, the free mother of the promised seed, to the Christian Church. But it is important to note that in this passage now before us we have an example of this application of types from the Old Testament in illustration of Christian truths direct from the teaching of the Lord Jesus Himself. It is certain, then, from Christ's own example, that an intelligent reader of the Old Testament, whose heart is full of Christian truth, need not hesitate to seek illus-

trations of the doctrines he loves in the whole Old Testament narrative. This teaching of the types has often been exaggerated and abused; but here we may see how the Lord Himself used it with no exaggeration, simply to illustrate the doctrine he wished to teach by a familiar plain figure. "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life." It is very interesting and important to see how the Lord Himself applies the Old Testament; how, with His mind full of the great truths of the Gospel, He sees their image reflected even in the plainest narrative.

And now let us consider the exact force of the figure which the Lord adapts in the text to the illustration of Christian truth, that we may understand its appropriateness. We shall see in passing how different it is in its simplicity from many exaggerations of the teaching by types which the Church has since heard of.* Observe, this is one of the few passages in which the Lord prophesies of His death distinctly as an atonement for men. So in Matthew xx. 28, the Lord himself says, "The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." The simple appropriateness of the figure in the text, as illustrative of this doctrine of the Atonement, is much to be noted. St. Paul (Romans viii. 3) says, "What the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh." The phrase thus used by the Apostle, "in the likeness of sinful flesh," seems not unnaturally to suggest that our Lord, in employing this image of

* Olshausen in loc.

the brazen serpent in the text,* considered its appropriateness to consist partly, at least, in the deadly malady of the Israelites having been cured by their looking to the very likeness of that which had caused it. The serpent might naturally enough be taken as an emblem of sin, and Christ to remove sin appeared in the likeness of sinful flesh. This is one important point in the figure.

Again, the phrase "lifted up," which our Lord uses in the text, is to be noted. We have it again in this same Gospel of St. John. In the 8th chapter, the Lord, having declared Himself to be "the light of the world" (v. 12), to have come "from above" (v. 23), to be "speaking to the world those things which He had heard from the Father" (v. 26), adds in the 28th verse, "When ye shall have lifted up the Son of Man, then shall ye know that I am he." And in the 12th chapter, 32nd verse, he says, "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." And that there may be no doubt of the meaning of the phrase "lifted up," St. John explains it, v. 33, "This he said, signifying what death he should die:" and the Jews evidently understood it as referring to his death; for in verse 34 we read, "The people answered him, We have heard out of the law that Christ abideth for ever; and how sayest thou, The Son of Man must be lifted up?" It is obvious, then, that the "lifting up" of the Son of Man spoken of in the text refers to Christ's crucifixion.

As the Book of Numbers tells us that the dying Israelites, perishing from the bite of the serpents, were restored to health when they gazed on the likeness of the serpent raised aloft, so Christ, the Son of Man, in the likeness of sinful flesh, cures those who are dying of sin when they look to Him.

* Cf. Olshausen, as above.

He was lifted up on the cross, that whoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. The appropriateness of the image of the lifting up is very plain. Here, then, in the image He employs, we have the doctrine of the Atonement, as set before us by the Lord Himself.

Let us endeavour reverently to dwell on the thoughts which the doctrine thus simply taught by Christ suggests to us. Christ's manhood and His suffering manhood, the Son of Man—the Son of Man lifted up—is here set before us as the source of life to dying souls. Let us not be deceiving ourselves by supposing that eternal life is to be gained for men by anything short of directing their thoughts and hearts and all the aspirations of their souls to the Lord Jesus Christ and His atonement. We find a few verses after our text (vv. 17, 18): "God sent his Son into the world that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth in him is not condemned, but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he believeth not in the name of the only begotten Son of God." All men are building, then, on a foundation which is not the foundation of the Gospel, who expect to be saved because of their fulfilment of moral duties without their hearts being turned to the crucified Redeemer. If we would do men lasting good—such good as is to last when the things seen and perishing fail them—it must be by directing their thoughts and hearts to Christ upon the Cross. Other benefits which we may confer upon them are good for time, this only is good for eternity. Secular knowledge, good habits, excellent as they are in their way, are powerless to save the soul which is not taught to look to the Crucified Redeemer.

But what do we mean by this looking to Christ upon the

Cross? The image of the text is a very strong one. The dying Israelites are represented in the 21st of Numbers as simply turning their eyes to the brazen serpent: "And it came to pass that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass he lived." Our Lord could not have more distinctly illustrated the freeness of that salvation which He offers to perishing sinners than by employing this remarkable image. And we dare not spoil it of its force from any fear of encouraging men to think that because grace abounds they may continue in sin. What we have to do is to proclaim the Gospel as the Lord Jesus Christ has revealed it, in all its freedom. Revel. xxii. 17: "The Spirit and the Bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come: and whosoever will, let him come and take of the water of life freely." Freely (*δωρεάν*), as a gift. There are no limits to God's mercy in His Son offered on the Cross for us. The greatest sinner is invited to look to the Son of Man lifted up on the Cross; and he that looks shall live.

My friends, do we feel our hearts at times hard? is the world gaining a hold over us? Nothing is more likely to refresh and strengthen us, and quicken our dying affections towards heavenly things, than the thought of the great unmerited goodness of God in thus offering us and pressing on us salvation through His Son's death. The great value of the sacrament of the Lord's body and blood is, that it presses on us Christ crucified. Christ crucified is the sole meritorious cause of our salvation, and from Him flows life freely to dying souls. All this is set before us in the image of the text. Let us endeavour all of us continually to meditate on this spectacle of everlasting love—the Son of God taking human

form, suffering as man, lifted up upon the cross to be the source of life to every one who will look to Him.

If the thought of God's goodness through Christ can thus take possession of men's hearts, really take possession of them, not in words but in truth, we need not fear but that their lives will answer to their profession. He who knows that the Lord Jesus Christ has died for him, not that He has died merely as a matter of history, but that He has died for him, and has his heart touched by the personal application of this great truth, cannot live otherwise than as one of God's redeemed children. The Lord Jesus Christ calls us all freely to be partakers of the blessings of His sacrifice; and if we look to Him and give Him up our hearts, it will be well with us for eternity. This simple doctrine is proclaimed in the text distinctly by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself—"As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life."

IX.—THE BOOK OF LIFE.

REVELATION xxi. 27.

“They which are written in the Lamb’s book of life.”

READ the whole verse. “There shall in no wise enter into it” (that is, into the Holy City—the New Jerusalem of God) “anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie : but they which are written in the Lamb’s book of life.”

We are apt to be deceiving ourselves as to the limits between the world and the Church; and here I use the word Church in its highest sense, as the company of the true people of God. This company is here spoken of as “They which are written in the Lamb’s book of life.” This image comes originally from the Old Testament. In Exod. xxxii., when Moses is pleading for the children of Israel, and begs that his punishment may be accepted for their sin, he says (v. 32) “Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin—; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written.”

And God answers—“Whosoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book.” In Daniel xii. 1, when the heavenly Being who instructs the prophet is telling of a dreadful time of trouble coming, he adds—“Thy people shall

be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book." In the New Testament (Philipp. iv. 3) we have St. Paul using this image when he speaks of Clement and other his fellow labourers, "Whose names are in the book of life." And in this he but follows our Lord Himself, who, when He had told His disciples, Luke x. 20, not to rejoice on account of the miraculous powers He gave them, added—"But rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven." Again, in Revel. iii. 5, Christ, speaking of the dangers that beset the church of Sardis, says—"He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels." Again, in Revel. xiii. 8, St. John, seeing in vision the power and success of the great enemy of Christ, says—"All that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life." And a similar expression is found in chapter xvii. 8. In Revel. xx. 12, in the description of the judgment of the dead, small and great standing before God, we read, in words found also in a similar description in the 7th chapter of Daniel, v. 10, "The books were opened." These books of judgment contain the history of all the deeds done by men, from the time of Adam to the end. They contain, it has been well said, "a complete, true, impartial, universal history" (Bengel, quoted by Hengstenberg). They are many—the books—for they have recorded in them the long series of the deeds, words, and motives of a very vast multitude; and opposed to these books of judgment stands another book—a single volume—perhaps because in it are written names only and not actions, the names of the people

of God ; and also because, many though the people of God may be, they must fall short of the number of the ungodly. "Another book was opened, which is the book of life."

Now this figure, "they which are written in the Lamb's book of life," thus frequently used, does not I think imply any peculiar Calvinistic view as to who the Redeemed are, or speak of any limiting of their number by an arbitrary decree ; still less does it lead us to dwell on the indefectibility of grace, as if those who were once living in covenant with God could never fall from their high privileges.

That is a very solemn addition to the figure, full of warning, which we have found in three of the passages quoted. God speaks of "blotting out of the book of life" names once written there. An addition to the figure this, evidently made that none may be uplifted with spiritual pride, and that he who thinketh he standeth may be warned to take heed lest he fall. On the other hand, it is certain that in Revel. xvii. 8, it is distinctly set forth that the names in the book of life have been written there from the foundation of the world. The words are—"They that dwell on the earth shall wonder (shall admire the power of the enemy of Christ), whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world ;" and many think that, if we examine the passage critically, we must allow the same to be the force of the words used in chapter xiii. 8. God here sets it forth for the encouragement of those who are His real people, that their names have been known to Him from eternity. And when to this He adds the warning conveyed in the figure that names may be blotted out of His book, what is this but the

same cautious guarding of the doctrine of predestination which we find all through the Bible, and which from the Bible has been transferred into the 17th Article of our Church?

There is, therefore, no peculiarly Calvinistic doctrine inculcated by this phrase and figure as used in the text and the several other places of the Old and New Testament, "They which are written in the Lamb's book of life." But it does refer the soul's salvation distinctly to the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ knows the souls that are His, and preserves, as it were, a list of them in the presence of the Father. How important for us to have each good reason to believe that his own name is written in that list!

Now we have said that men are certainly deceiving themselves as to the limits which separate the World and the Church—meaning by the Church here the company of true believers, as by the World we mean the company of those who are living without Christ. The text gives us one designation of the Church in this sense:—"They which are written in the Lamb's book of life." Another designation for the people of God may be taken from the 7th chapter of Revelation (v. 14):—"They have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." Do not both these designations lead us to feel how all the hopes and blessings of the Redeemed flow directly from the Lord Jesus Christ?

It is very necessary that we should keep distinctly in mind the limits which separate the people of God from the ungodly world. It is of great importance that we should know to which set of persons each of us belongs. I would not encourage the drawing of arbitrary distinctions

between man and man, far less that uncharitable exclusiveness which makes the spiritually proud say to his neighbour, "Stand aside; I am more righteous than thou." Still, certainly there is a distinction between the people of God and the world; and this is the most important of all distinctions, since it will last through eternity. Also it separates many who are very nearly associated together, and very much alike in their common employments — ("Two men shall be in one bed; the one shall be taken and the other left: two women shall be grinding together; the one shall be taken and the other left: two men shall be in the field; the one shall be taken and the other left.")—Obviously, then, we ought to see clearly wherein the distinction between Christians and the ungodly world consists.

We have spoken of the people of God now, as "they that are written in the Lamb's book of life; they that have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." These names go to the root of the matter, and turn our thoughts to that personal connexion between the soul and the Lord Jesus Christ, which constitutes the claim of Church membership in the highest and most real sense. They who have not this personal connexion with the Lord Jesus Christ are not of his people. On the distinction thus indicated it is right especially to dwell, but other distinctions also are often made between the Church and the world, which are very important, and very proper to be insisted on in their due place. But none of these come up to what we are in search of. Let us for a few minutes examine them.

1. There is the distinction of mere profession. One man says, "I am a Christian; I believe what Christ has said, and

I worship God through Christ." Another does not even call himself by the name of Christ. Or, to look at this distinction of profession in another light, as marking a separation even in the body of nominal Christians: one man distinctly professes that he not only bears the name of Christian, but makes it his life's business to follow Christ; another, though he bears the Christian name, dares not to say that he is really anxious to be one of Christ's true people. He knows, in his conscience, that he is contented to float with the stream, to be borne in a crowd along the broad way. He knows that he puts the thought of the solemn realities of Christ's religion away from him, and gives up his heart altogether to pleasure or worldly business; that he has not real distinct Christian aims in his life, and therefore he says he will not be a hypocrite, and pretend that he is better than he really is. The man is right not to be a hypocrite; but is not his state melancholy, since he acknowledges that he is living without God, and has no hopes in Christ? The other, indeed, is not to be saved on account of his professions: they may be the mere pretences of a hypocritical spirit, a veil assumed to deceive other men, or to give false comfort to his own heart. St. James has said enough against such deceit. Read his 2nd chapter, and lay it to heart, and you will not trust in phrases or the profession of feelings, without the realities of a Christian life. But though no man will be saved by professions, I scarcely see how any can be saved without them. If a man dare not say, "I am a Christian, by the help of God I will live as a Christian, I will take my part with the people of God, and will strive to be directed by Christ's will, and not by the world's rules," he cannot be one of Christ's redeemed. Profession, then, is something, is an

indispensable requisite, though it will not give a test to distinguish the members of the true Church of the Redeemed.

2. The second distinction, much dwelt on as separating the Church from the world, is the ceremonial distinction. Now ceremonial distinctions are of more kinds than one. There are ceremonials appointed directly by God Himself, like the blessed sacraments; there are ceremonials not appointed directly in this manner by God Himself, but venerable from their antiquity, as having been adopted, many of them, from the earliest ages, by the Universal Church of Christ, and therefore as having received the heartfelt loyal approval of Christ's most chosen servants in many ages and nations. Such, as most believe, are confirmation, for example, and that form of Church government which our own Church maintains by bishops, priests, and deacons, other form than which never really prevailed in any land where Christ was preached, if not actually from the Apostles' days, at least from those of their immediate followers, for fifteen hundred years. Again, there are other ceremonials which have no such venerable authority. There are usages, for example, of any particular Church, which a member of that Church would be undutiful if he transgressed. And there are ceremonials also of no public appointment, sanctioned merely by the tacit agreement of certain individuals, because they find the observance of them conducive to their own spiritual advancement.

We ought always to be very careful not to confound these various kinds of ceremonial enactment. Obviously the last named kind has the least authority—those rules which are laid down by individuals, or the tacit agreement of many individuals, as to what amusements, for example, Christian men

are to abstain from, as inconsistent with the gravity of a Christian, though not sinful in themselves. These are binding by no authority, except the force of public opinion; and the public opinion even of good men is very fallible. Yet will no man who is wise ever lightly set aside even such ceremonial rules as these. An earnest Christian fears that his setting them aside may be mistaken by the worldly for an announcement that he considers the good men who have sanctioned them as hypocrites, and that he deems the world right not to be too strict.

The ceremonial distinctions, then, which separate the people of Christ from the careless and worldly, even those of them which have least authority, though they are not to be made too much of, are not to be set aside without some good reason, nor without due deliberation undertaken calmly, thoughtfully, as in God's sight. And those higher ceremonial distinctions which are established by some constituted authority in the Church to which a man belongs, even if they be rules confined to his own particular Church, are to be treated reverently: still more, if they have the time-honoured sanction of all Christendom. For a private Christian to set these aside on his own responsibility, is factiously to disobey those who, by God's appointment, have a right to command; whilst, as to those higher ceremonies which come direct from God, a man who thinks lightly of these—as of baptism, or the Supper of the Lord—and stands aloof from either of them, is distinctly violating the command of his Saviour, and cutting himself off from a great means of grace, which the Lord Himself has blessed. If God thought fit to establish two especial ceremonies to be held in reverence of all Christians, and

to be means by which the Grace of His Holy Spirit is given, a man who neglects either is doing what he can to cut himself off from the communion of the faithful. What should we say of a Christian who did not pray? And prayer is not more truly an ordinance of Christ than is the Supper of the Lord. Consider this, any who, as holy seasons come round, do not kneel at the Lord's table. Standing apart from it, you proclaim distinctly to which class you belong: not to the people of Christ, but to those who will not come to Him. Ceremonial acts, then, and ceremonial rules—from the highest to the lowest of them—are not to be treated as of light moment in the distinction between the world and the Church of Christ.

3. But besides and above ceremonial distinctions there are, thirdly, those distinctions which have to do with an immutable morality. It is vain, of course, for a man to speak of himself as a real Christian who is living in open sin. Vain also is it for any one to deceive himself by speaking of having his sins washed in the precious blood of Christ, and his name written in the Lamb's book of life, who is not striving after something far higher in his practice than the observance of the common moral rules. Sins of temper, sins of harsh judgment, sins of being weakly influenced by those around us—against these every true Christian strives very earnestly, with the Holy Spirit's help; and if it be said that those who make no professions of religion are in some cases more generous, self-denying, considerate, kind, than those who call themselves Christ's people, I fear this only proves that in such instances those who so call themselves are something very like hypocrites. They may not know it, but how can they

be the people of Christ if they are not endowed with Christian graces? The distinctions, then, of morality, of good living, and benevolence, are all-important in the estimate we have to form as to the line that separates the Church and the world. Worldly men may be examples to their generation in many things that are excellent. We may feel, on account of this excellence, that we dare not judge them. It is not to enable us to judge others that we are speaking now of the distinctions between the world and the Church, but that each man may judge himself. And this is greatly to be considered by each in his judgment, whether to all good human qualities he adds the graces of a spiritual mind. The good human qualities cannot be dispensed with, but true Christians add to them something above what is human—desires, affections, steadfast purposes, which are direct from Christ.

We come to this, then, as the result of all, that the great distinction between the Church and the world is not one of profession only—though he who is a true Christian professes to be so; nor a distinction in the ceremonials of religion only—though a true Christian prizes the ceremonial observances which God gives him for his soul's health, and uses them as in God's sight; neither is it a distinction only of the common morality of life—though the true Christian excels others in his common outward living; but it is a spiritual distinction. God the Holy Spirit working in the heart calls up in the really Christian heart many feelings of which the worldly have no knowledge. For example, true Christians have a deep feeling of humiliation on account of sin past—an earnest longing to be kept free from it for the future—a nice sensitiveness of conscience as to what sin is—an ardent attach-

ment to the Lord Jesus Christ as the soul's friend who has redeemed it. They have a conviction also that their aims in life do not centre on this world, but are all capable of being carried on and realized in the immediate presence of Him, in the book which contains the list of whose people they trust that their names are written, and who washes them and makes them holy in His own blood.

X.—THE LAKE OF FIRE.

REVELATION XX. 15.

“And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.”

THE world and the true people of God—the difference between them is, we have seen, infinite. Yet often they are very closely intermixed—a line, at times not discerned by human eyes, but always most clearly marked in God’s sight, runs between them, separating often members of the same family. Two children reared in the same nursery—taught the same prayers by the same mother—how often, as life wears on, even continuing to live in the same home, do they separate for eternity—the one to be a humble follower of the Lord Jesus Christ, the other to put self and the things of time in the place of God. The world and the Church of the true people of God—my friends, what question more unspeakably important—to which of these two bodies do you, do I, belong?

Now, to help us in considering this subject further—the distinction between the two bodies here in time, and their necessary connexion, and their coming final separation—call to mind the parable of the wheat and the tares. The two—the wheat and tares—very unlike in character, were both to grow together until the harvest; but when the harvest came they were to be separated for ever. The harvest, says our Lord, is the end of the world. As year passes after year, the end is

drawing nearer. To which body do we belong now—in which body shall we be found when our probation-time is over?

The angel, in the 22nd chapter of the Revelation, marks the close of man's time of trial in the well-known words:—"He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still." When the trial-time ends, he that is one of Christ's people will have the inexpressible satisfaction of feeling that he can sin no more, and no more be tempted to forget his Saviour: he that is of the world the inexpressible anguish of knowing that he must abide now by those with whom he has chosen to cast in his lot, and must be separated from Christ for ever. There can surely be no doubt that when our trial-time ends (whenever that may be) we shall be separated for ever into the two classes—Christ's people and those who are outcasts from Him. This we shall see enters into the very idea of a state of trial—that the trial must have an end. God, of course, will not go on being trifled with for ever. But while our years on earth last, is it true that there is even now such a separation as we have spoken of?

Let us consider the whole matter of the present and coming separation of the Church of the Redeemer and the world with becoming attention.

1. It is not denied that the very idea of a time of probation lasting implies that the line is not sharply drawn as yet irrevocably to separate the two classes for ever. Certainly those who give fair promise may fall away—a heart in which the Holy Spirit has striven to call up holy thoughts may grieve and quench the Spirit. Scripture says distinctly (Heb. vi. 4) that those who were once

enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and been made partakers of the Holy Ghost, may fall away. While the trial of the people of God lasts, it seems essential to the very idea of their trial that they may thus lose their first love. This is an alarming thought, one which it is well to call to mind, lest at any time we become careless, though still our general trust in God's great mercy, to our souls, through Jesus Christ, will prevent us from being too much alarmed by the danger in the midst of which we dwell. On the other hand, it must be true also for the wicked that, during all this time while probation lasts, the gate of mercy must stand open, and men may pass from the city of destruction to the holy city. Parents, be very watchful and careful for your children. Have you a promising child? Pray for him. Have you a thoughtless child? Never cease to pray for him: the trial-time still lasts. Husbands and wives, brothers and sisters—all pray one for another while the probation-time lasts. God has indeed left you much in each other's power; and, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, beware lest by word or deed you do anything to endanger those around you. It is granted, then, that the people of God and the world are not only very closely intermixed while their trial lasts, but that they operate upon each other—the worldly to seduce the faithful, the faithful to call the worldly to repentance; and that the endeavours of both are often successful—the one for seduction, the other for reformation.

2. Still, though the two classes are thus brought very near to each other and operate on each other thus powerfully, they are distinct in their pursuits—in the motives for which they pursue them—in their views of life, their hopes for death, and the feelings they entertain towards God their Saviour. This

marked distinctness of separation between them is not affected by the undoubted fact that while their trial lasts the separation is often broken through for good and for evil. If there be not this distinct separation, what are we to make of such words as the following, taken, for example, out of St. John?—

John xiv. 17. "The world cannot receive the Spirit of truth, because it seeth Him not, neither knoweth Him; but ye know Him: for He dwelleth with you, and shall be in you."

John xv. 18, 19. "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you."

1 John ii. 15. "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him."

Such words must imply that there is, even while their trial lasts, a plain separation between the world and the people of God, however near they are to each other. This is one of our points, that the world and the Church are separated even now, though not irrevocably.

Another point is, that soon the separation will be established beyond all power of alteration. This second point also rests on clear statements of Scripture. (Matt. xxv. 46.) We need not, in further explanation of the parable of the tares, insist on our Lord's distinct account of the award of the judgment day—"These shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal,"—or enter on any discussion as to the exact meaning of the word eternal. The saying of the angel, already quoted from Revel. xxii.,

telling of the way in which its character cleaves irrevocably to the soul at last, establishes this point both by reason and by Scripture.

It results indeed from the very idea of a probation-state, that, when at last all probation is ended, the ungodly and the holy must continue as the end leaves them. If it be true that in the idea of a probation-state is implied the doctrine that, while the probation lasts, men's state as belonging to the good or the bad class is not yet fixed for ever, it is quite as essential to the idea of probation that it cannot last always, and that when it does end the state in which it leaves each man must for him be final.

Now God cannot go on for ever offering to the faithless opportunities which they despise. The very idea of a time of trial or probation, as it implies an end to God's waiting, seems to imply, at least for those who trifle with God's mercy, a hopeless never-ending punishment. Remark this also, that, as the end of our trial-state implies an award as to our fate which is final and irrevocable, so there is not a hint in Scripture of any trial after this life. Death is represented as settling our state irrevocably.

We are right, then, in our two points. The world and the Church, nearly as the members of the two bodies are at present united, and possible as it is now to pass from the one to the other, are even now separate, and they will soon be in that position in which a great gulf is fixed between them, over which there will no longer be any possibility of passing. The sum of the whole matter stated shortly is this, that even now, nearly as they approach and much as they act on each other, the distinction between those who belong to the Church of the redeemed and those who belong

to the world is infinite, and that soon the distinction will be fixed immutable beyond recal for ever.

Now each of these two propositions is much disputed in the present day. Men are ready to maintain the contradictory of each of them; holding, first, that the Church and the world are not to be regarded as separated while time lasts, and that those who refuse to become Christ's true people do not subject themselves to everlasting punishment.

1. There is certainly a great laxity abroad in men's views as to the distinctions between the faithful and the faithless. Such laxity may always be expected in worldly persons. He who gives up his heart to the pursuits of this life cannot bear to think that earnest Christians are right in assuming what appears to him a tone of morose exclusiveness. He is glad to believe that such men are righteous overmuch. Even the better sort of worldly men cannot abide the thought of such distinctions. Nay, perhaps they object to them even more strongly than the openly wicked. These last are quite reckless, and, as they do not pretend to any religious earnestness, they are not so much hurt because those who are moved by it look on them with disapproval; but the morally respectable of those who are living altogether for this life—they cannot bear to think that their respectability does not entitle them to take the highest place. They know that they are very different from the profligate and abandoned, and they will not consent to condemn themselves by allowing that God has, quite separate from them and above them, his own body of faithful people on earth, who, looking to the Lord Jesus Christ continually, derive from Him, through the Holy Spirit, blessings and privileges to which they are entire strangers. Thus the great majority of men

are very unwilling to allow, in any practical way, that there is a distinction between the world and true believers.

2. There is certainly a great unwillingness also to allow that those who continue out of the number of the faithful must be lost for ever. Here we might expect that it would not be the morally respectable that are most apt to object. The recorded saying of Charles II. represents the feeling, which, whether expressed or no, is very common in the hearts of men of vicious lives, that God Almighty surely will not visit His creatures with eternal misery for taking a little more pleasure than they ought. In fact, vicious men do not believe in hell. If they believed in it in any real sense they must be miserable. And many, besides vicious men, have a great difficulty in believing in it. The common sort of careless worldly persons, how can they really believe in hell? They have no thoughts fit for heaven; they are making no efforts by the Holy Spirit's help to prepare for it. And if they believed in any real sense, that not to be ready for heaven when they come to die is to be consigned to hell, how could they go on in their easy thoughtlessness? Add to this, that not the vicious and the careless only, but even earnest thoughtful men, have their difficulties in believing in it; that confused notions of the mercy of God are very commonly put forth amongst us even in systems of theology, without a due consideration of His awful purity and His hatred of sin; that His mercy is thus thought to be inconsistent with severity even against the finally impenitent; and we shall see that there is great danger lest the plain Bible statements come to be overlooked, and men learn to put the thought of coming evil from them, and laxity follow both of life and doctrine.

It has been said by some to be an especial evil sign of the

times we live in, that there seems to be a combination to banish the belief in hell. Now it may be quite true that exaggerated pictures of the nature of eternal punishments, drawn by well-meaning but unwise men, have at times done harm; that the fear of such punishments is not the most effectual motive which the Holy Spirit uses for winning souls; but still in such matters we shall find our only wisdom is to teach as the Bible guides us; and certainly no one will ever rise from a fair consideration of the Bible without feeling that it contains very alarming statements, which tell men that, if they trifle with God's mercy in Jesus Christ, they must be lost for ever. Death is the end of their trial-state.

And now, if there be this danger, lest too lax views prevail both as to the present and the coming final distinctions between the Church of Christ's redeemed and the world that has no care for Christ, what lesson ought we to take for ourselves? If we are wise we shall make it an especial subject of our prayers, that our judgment in all such matters may be based on the strictness of God's truth, whatever it may tell us, and not on our own fancies. It is miserable to speak of peace to the soul when there is no ground for peace. The Gospel is the Gospel of peace, but only to those who love the Lord Jesus Christ. Those who love Him not—who are not living in communion with Him—looking to Him daily to cleanse them by His blood, and give them strength by His Spirit, and regarding His favour as the one thing worth living for—have no ground for peace.

The lapse of time tells us that it is madness not to make decidedly our choice to be with Christ. No possible concep-

tions you can form of God's mercy will enable you to persuade yourselves that the lost opportunities of a year when it is gone are not gone from you for ever. Very soon all life will be over as the past year, and then, as the end of our trial leaves us, we must be for ever with Christ, or for ever separated from Him. Let us pray for strength that we may take our stand with Him and His people now at once, that thus we may be His always.

XI.—TRINITY SUNDAY.

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GENESIS i. 26. . . .

“And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. . . .”

THERE is no doubt that the 1st chapter of Genesis is chosen as one of the Lessons for Trinity Sunday, on account of its containing these words: “God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.”

It could not fail to be early remarked that the creation of man is introduced in this passage in a different way from any of the other acts of creation. With respect to the others we read, for example, v. 3, “God said, Let there be light: and there was light.”

v. 6. “God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters.” 7. “And God made the firmament.”

v. 20. “God said, Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life.” 21. “And God created great whales, and every living creature that moveth, which the waters brought forth abundantly.”

The like form is used in describing the other acts of creation. But the form is different when we come to the creation of man. There is as it were then a pause and a consultation. God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.”

The Jewish writers could not but observe this, and have endeavoured to account for it. Various ways of accounting

for the form have been suggested. Some say, God here addresses the angels, and calls them in to His counsel before He proceeds to this His crowning act of the earthly creation. But this is scarcely consistent with the awful distance which separates the Almighty from all created beings, even the highest angels, who are figuratively represented as veiling their faces with their wings, lest they be consumed by the brightness of His majesty.

Others say there is no deliberation here at all. The plural number (let us make man in our image) is simply used as kings use it among ourselves. But to this it is answered, the Hebrews did indeed use the second and third persons in the plural, in this way—make ye, and let them make; but not the first, let us make. There is no example, it is said, in which in Hebrew one single being speaks of himself as we or us—"let us make man." Some then have suggested, God may be here represented figuratively as addressing the elements—the earth and water—as it were: Come, give me the materials out of which to form man's body, and I will breathe into him a soul. But this is fanciful. The early Christian writers, as Augustine, *e. g.* (De Genesi ad lit. in loc.), saw something much deeper in the phrase. How often is it stated in the New Testament that God created all things by the Eternal Son: as St. John (i. 3) says of The Word, "All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made:" and St. Paul (Col. i. 16) of the Son, "For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible . . . all things were created by him, and for him:" and again (Ephes. iii. 9) speaks of "God, who created all

things by Jesus Christ." There are abundant traces throughout the New Testament of the Son's part in the work of creation.

Hence the great poet is but following the best divines—guided by what the New Testament tells us of the way to interpret such passages in the Old—when he thus paraphrases the words before us:—

"Therefore the Omnipotent
Eternal Father (for where is not He
Present?) thus to his Son audibly spake :
'Let us make now man in our image.'"*

Again, the words in the 2nd verse of this chapter are much to be noted—"The Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters." "The earth was without form, and void ; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters." Some interpret these words merely of a strong wind, called the wind or Spirit of God to denote a strong mighty blast, by the well-known Hebrew figure by which great trees are called trees of the Lord, and great mountains are called mountains of God ; and in Jonah iii. 3, the words translated "Nineveh was an exceeding great city," mean, literally, a city great before or to God. Others again, still interpreting the words of the wind, say that it is called the wind or Spirit of God, as being sent by God. As in the 147th Psalm, 18th verse, we read of God—"He causeth his wind to blow, and the waters flow." So they say this wind is spoken of as His wind—the wind of God—because employed by Him to blow over the waters of chaos, and prepare them for the commencement of the work of

* 'Paradise Lost,' vii. 526.

terrestrial creation. But Christian writers generally, and with them many of the Jews, cannot thus understand the words. With them, the terms translated in our version "Spirit of God," are taken to mean the Spirit of God—the Holy Spirit—which, coming forth from the Eternal Father, rested on the unformed and dark void of chaos, raising within it the first stirrings of that life with which it was soon to teem. The great poet is again but following the fathers of the Church and the best commentators, when he writes how in the beginning—

“ Thus God the heaven created, thus the earth,
Matter unform'd and void : Darkness profound
Cover'd the abyss ; but on the watery calm
His brooding wings the Spirit of God outspread,
And vital virtue infused, and vital warmth,
Throughout the fluid mass.”

Certainly those who, on the authority of the New Testament, believe in the doctrine of three persons in one God, will find it but natural to expect some intimations of the presence, if not of the active operation, of each of the blessed Persons of the Trinity in this earliest description of God's creative work.

We find, then, here abundant reason why this chapter should have been selected to be read on Trinity Sunday, without our entering on disputed questions as to the Hebrew name by which God is designated ; as in the first verse of this chapter, *Elohim*, which certainly has a plural termination, and which many therefore have contended does of itself hint that there is a plurality of persons in the Godhead, joined, as it is, with a verb in the singular, and thus speaking, they say, at once of several and of one. This reference, however, to the word *Elohim* opens up too intricate a question, too

much mixed with discussions as to the usages of the Hebrew language, to be capable of a profitable settlement here. Without entering on any discussion of this word, we have abundant reasons for the selection of the chapter in the words of our text, and the thoughts to which they give rise.

Observe, no sensible man will contend that such a passage as our text is a proof of the doctrine of the Trinity ; the truth of that doctrine must be proved in a very different way ; not by bringing up single texts even of the New Testament, far less such obscure texts as this of the Old, but rather by a patient examination of the whole teaching of the Word of God after Christ came and the Holy Spirit was revealed. It is from such a patient examination of the whole teaching of our Lord and his Apostles that the Church has arrived at a calm decision which no ingenious speculations of eighteen hundred years have been able to shake, that the only really Scriptural account to be given of the inscrutable nature of the ever-blessed God, is that which, confessing its utter inability to fathom the mysteries of the being of the Eternal, is contented to acknowledge that the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God, and yet certainly that there are not three Gods, but one God.

Such passages as the text are of no use as proofs of this doctrine ; only, when the mind is satisfied from other proofs what the real Scripture doctrine is, it finds good thoughts accordant with its belief suggested by such passages. We believe, from the teaching of our Lord and his Apostles, in God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Here we open the very first chapter of the Bible—the record of the very earliest dealings of God with this lower world—and we find something remarkable in the words before us in the text describ-

ing the creation of man, something which, when carefully examined, is at first difficult of explanation. But when we call to mind the doctrine of the Trinity, the difficulty disappears. If there are three Persons in the one Godhead, we must look upon the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, as each acting upon man from his first creation. Here, then, we see the appropriateness of the text and the connected verses to be read on Trinity Sunday.

There is, indeed, a very plain sense in which the work of the blessed Son of God may be looked upon as not beginning till the days of the New Testament, nor the work of the Holy Spirit till the first Whitsunday. But though not yet distinctly revealed, these Eternal Persons of the Godhead had been at work long before. The Jehovah of the Old Testament—the personally revealed manifestation of Elohim—the Lord who (as related in the first lesson for this evening, 18th Gen.) appeared to Abraham in the plains of Mamre in human form, and promised the patriarch a son in his old age—who listened condescendingly and in mercy to his reasoning as he interceded for the few faithful souls that might be found in Sodom—was doubtless the same who, in after years, again visited the same land in humble human guise, and wept at the thought of the fate of the sons of Abraham when their wickedness provoked God to end their many privileges by a judgment as severe as that which once fell on Sodom. It was He, too, doubtless, who spake with Moses, and fought for his people with wonderful signs, and condescended to be personally their king. Thus the Eternal Son was acting and controlling the affairs of man long before New Testament days. So, too, long before the Holy Spirit came down on the Apostles on the first Whitsunday,

or on Jesus at His baptism, He had been speaking by the prophets and guiding the hearts of the faithful, as David testifies, though as yet He did not dwell amongst them with the fulness of the Christian blessing.

It may be well for us here, in reference to the passage before us, to consider how thoughts connected with the doctrine of the blessed Trinity ought to be around us everywhere, not only when we turn to the distinctly Christian truths, and call to mind how the Son died to justify, and the Holy Spirit sanctifies God's people.

It is well for us to think of truths connected with this great doctrine of the Trinity in all our ordinary life. It is not in the inner region of the peculiar Gospel doctrine of grace applied to our own souls alone that we find traces both of the Holy Spirit and the Son. The doctrine of the Trinity obviously enters into all our deeper thoughts as to our own personal religion, but I wish to point out also how the truths of this doctrine should be around us everywhere. *E.g.* Are we looking in the beginning of this summer season on the beautiful face of nature, and are we gladdened by the sight of what is truly each year a new creation of external nature, while woods and gardens are clothed with fresh charms, and draw our minds upwards to think of the bright days when all things were fresh and clear and beautiful in Eden? We may hesitate to maintain that it is the Holy Spirit of God which gives each year this natural life. Often, too, are we painfully reminded, while the outward world is most beautiful, that the inner nature of the men and women who move in it is sunk in sin, dead to spiritual life. Still this yearly rising of outward nature from the coldness and dryness of winter to its summer life furnishes us with many images that speak of the cold, dry,

dead soul when breathed on by the sovereign grace of God. Again, this yearly resurrection of the outward world to a short-lived beauty, to be once more, after a few months, nipped by the returning frosts, makes us look forward with longing to a time when the world shall be restored perfectly to its first lost beauty, and shall never again lose it—a time only to be accomplished when the Holy Spirit of God shall have gained possession of all the souls that remain upon the earth, and shall have triumphed over sin for ever. As we suppose the Holy Spirit of God to have had a part in the first creation of the world and of man in the days of innocency, so certainly He will pervade all living souls in the new earth when sin is overcome.

Again, if it be not the outward face of still nature we are looking at, but human society, and the many institutions by which it is moulded into shape; and if we are deeply grieved to think how much of society is dead and lifeless, sunk in forgetfulness of God; how many of its fairest institutions, which were designed to guard and cherish ever-flowing sources of spiritual life, and spread Christian influence all around them, have, in the course of years, had all good things dried up within them, so that we almost despair of their ever being made alive again; then also the thought of the Almighty Spirit of God comes on us, with power to cheer us to exertion. We call to mind the prophet's vision of the valley full of dry bones; which were very dry, so that it seemed almost impossible that they could ever again live: and behold, when God's time came, there was a noise amongst the bones, and behold a shaking, and the bones came together, bone to his bone; and the sinews and flesh came up upon them, and the skin covered them from above, and in time

the breath came into them, and they lived and stood upon their feet, an exceeding great army.* These bones seen by the prophet represented the house of Israel, when they said, "Our bones are dried, our hope is lost:" and God said, "I will open your graves, and shall put my Spirit in you, and ye shall live." Thus the deadest, the most dull worldly state of society, and of the various institutions which we find in it, with families given up to worldliness, empty churches, ill-taught schools, careless pastors, even in the worst days, ought not to make Christ's people despair. If we are constant in begging God's help, a good time will come at last in spite of all discouragements, and that which is now dead and powerless will become in time instinct with life, and refresh every soul through the Almighty power of the Spirit of God breathing on it.

Thus all outward things may remind us of the Holy Spirit's creative power: and outward things speak to us also of the Son. Do we adore the Almighty Father in all His works, whether of still nature or of human society? The passage of our text reminds us that we cannot think of the Father apart from his Eternal Son. All the vagueness of our indistinct ideas of the Great First Cause, even our conceptions of the father of the human race, are gradually moulded in a Christian's mind into somewhat of the similitude of the Redeemer of our race. It may not be Christ, as He toiled in human form during his thirty-three years in Judæa, whom we think of, nor as He hung upon the cross; but still our conceptions of God can scarcely rise higher than the glorious form of the Eternal Son. We think, *e.g.*, of the

* Ezekiel xxxvii.

bright and awful vision seen by St. John in the Revelation. When St. John was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, he "heard behind him a great voice, as of a trumpet: and he turned, and there stood before him one like unto the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle: his body and his hairs were white as wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were as a flame of fire: and his countenance as the sun shining in his strength."* And when St. John saw him he fell at his feet as dead, for he felt that he had seen God. But this manifestation of God was the Lord Jesus Christ, the same on whose breast St. John had leaned at the Last Supper, the great Being who now ruled the Church and all things, but the same also who had bled for man. He laid his right hand upon John, saying unto him, "Fear not, I am the first and the last. I am he that liveth and was dead: and behold I am alive for evermore, amen: and have the keys of hell and death." So clearly was God revealed to the beloved Apostle in the likeness and person of the blessed Son. And thus for us also there is no lessening of the Majesty of God; rather is it the natural and right feeling of Christians that our thoughts of the Creator of the world, and the King of all living souls, should present to us the image of the Eternal Son, the merciful Redeemer.

Thus to every pious Christian heart the thought of God is no indistinct thought of a vast and incomprehensible spiritual essence. The thought of God is brought near to him through the doctrine of the Trinity. Wherever an earnest Christian turns he is reminded by all around him of the Father, the

* Revel. i.

Redeemer, and the life-giving Spirit of Holiness. Let us endeavour, brethren, to have our minds full of such thoughts, and thus God may be brought very near, and plainly set before each of us by this very doctrine, which so many speak of as dark and incomprehensible.

XII.—PARADISE.

(PREACHED IN CARLISLE CATHEDRAL.)

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GENESIS ii. 8, 9.

“And the Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed.

“And out of the ground made the Lord God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food.”

THE first two chapters of Genesis, it will be recollected, contain two accounts of the creation of man. The second is found in the verse immediately before our text. Let us examine it.

“The Lord God” (or Jehovah Elohim)—for it is well to note in this place the introduction of the name Jehovah, the personal name of the God of Israel, in addition to that other word for God which is used in the beginning of the book, Jehovah Elohim—“formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul.” The text then proceeds to describe the first abode of man. “And the Lord God had planted a garden (or Paradise) eastward in Eden (or in the Land of All Delights),* and there He placed the man whom He had formed. And out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant for the sight and good for food.” The words which follow give us a more detailed account of the nature of this earliest abode of man.

* Παράδεισος is used here by the LXX. The Greek ἡδὺνη is said to be connected with Eden through the Sanscrit.

Now, in reading this passage we are struck with a point of likeness between the beginning and the end of the Bible. The tree of life growing in this beautiful land, the cradle of the human race, of which we so soon lose sight in Genesis in the melancholy history that follows, reappears again in the end of the Book of Revelation. And there are other points of resemblance also in the two descriptions given respectively in Genesis and in the Revelation of the first abode of man, from which he fell, and the last abode, to which he hopes to be raised, when through Christ all the evils of the Fall are remedied. In the passage now before us, immediately after the text, we read how there stood in the midst of Paradise the tree of life, as well as the tree of knowledge of good and evil; and how there went out of Eden to water the garden a river—a gushing flood of waters—so full that it is represented as supplying their streams to four mighty rivers. And the same bright images reappear in the description of the New Jerusalem in the 22nd chapter of Revelation, v. 1: “He showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street . . . and on either side of the river was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month, and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.”

This picture of the life-giving tree in the Revelation is obviously suggested to St. John’s thoughts by recollections of the Book of Genesis. “To him that overcometh,” says Christ, by the mouth of St. John, in the 2nd chapter of this same Book of Revelation, verse 7, “to him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life which is in the

midst of the Paradise of God." This is a plain reference to Genesis.

Now, before we go farther in considering the passage of our text as compared with the 22nd of Revelation, call to mind how varied are some of the softening and elevating images which this comparison may suggest to Christian minds in the most different spheres of life. There is something remarkable in the fact, that while the state of man's earliest happiness and purity, when he came at first from the hand of his Creator, is described to us in the likeness of a purely simple country life, the state to which he is to rise after the trials of weary centuries is revealed under the image of life in a city; but both in the rural paradise at first, and in the city of the New Jerusalem at last, we have the tree of life growing, and the ever-flowing pure river the emblem of the water of life. The country scene in Genesis is the abode of man's first innocency before his history began, when there was no society as yet but that of the first pair; and the good as well as the evil of the thousand forms into which society moulds itself in the course of ages was consequently as yet unknown. The holy city in Revelation,* on the other hand, is the abode of the "nations of them which are saved," after the whole course of man's history is run, and after a thousand institutions have arisen which could not be found in the first days of inexperienced innocency, but which, nevertheless, are all capable of being hallowed to the service of God in Christ when the human race is regenerated.

It is well to bear in mind the twofold aspect under which the perfectly blessed state is thus set before us in Scripture :

* Ch. xxi. 24.

a rural life in Paradise; a city life in the New Jerusalem. It certainly would be wrong to suppose that dwellers in the country only can have the privilege of being surrounded by sights and sounds which speak to them of the delights which man might enjoy, if restored through Christ to the full image of God in which he was created; that dwellers in towns must be content to be excluded from the aid which ennobling associations may give towards such pure Christian thoughts. And this is not a matter too unimportant to find its way into a sermon: far otherwise.

It is granted that, in many of our cities, men have no great helps given them to good thoughts by any beautiful objects surrounding the unsightly streets, fringed by dark ill-ventilated lanes, dingy manufactories vomiting smoke, the very houses of God hastily and cheaply constructed buildings, without a single beauty of form: such are too often the chief characteristics of an English town, while men of wealth among the inhabitants who have money to spare too often spend all they can devote to such improvements in making their own houses comfortable or gorgeous, or in adorning their own quarter, without in any way allowing their poor fellow-townsmen to be sharers in such advantages of their prosperity. Now, without any inclination to praise the days that are past, a man can hardly help being struck by the fact that somehow there was more thought taken in the old days for adorning every city in the land with at least one building whose outward form might serve to stir those who looked on it by some elevating Christian thoughts. Who built the noble walls of this cathedral? We will not scrutinize too narrowly the motives which led each individual benefactor to encourage the work during the long period

which passed while each of these buildings was being raised. But this is certain, that some ennobling thoughts must certainly have been in minds which conceived the idea of works so capable of raising the heart, and carried their idea into execution. And each cathedral was a building for poor and rich alike.

It is granted of course that a man may be a faithful and very earnest Christian without any appreciation of beauty, and that a man may have much taste and no Christianity; but still the passages in the chapter of our text, and in the 22nd chapter of Revelation, and many others, show that God intended beautiful images to be a help to Christians both in town and country. And the Christian citizens of every town, if they are wise, will not neglect any means, however slight they may deem it, which God has pointed out as likely to be of use in raising and purifying their fellow-townsmen's thoughts.

Town life has undoubtedly a strong tendency to become selfishly busy; usually the upper classes in most of our towns are engrossed by money-making, or at best by thoughts of honourable advancement: or at certain seasons the place overflows with those who have no thought but pleasure. In its respectable forms town life is very apt to become utterly worldly; in its outcast revolting forms devilish. Yet the 22nd chapter of Revelation finds no better image than that of a glorious town in which to set before us the abode where Christ at last shall reign personally amongst the redeemed. All our many pursuits in society, as well as our solitary communings with nature in retirement, may be consecrated to Christ—all undertaken in His faith and fear—our daily pursuits of business may be made not unworthy

of Him, even in their outward forms and the circumstances that surround them ; while our diligent employment in them, sanctified by habitual prayer to God in Christ, may become the best preparation for our souls while we wait for Christ's coming. How necessary is this for us to bear in mind amid the many distractions of our ordinary town life. Would to God we could all sanctify it by prayer and many thoughts of Christ. Thus much is not unnaturally suggested to us as dwellers in a town, while we compare the 2nd of Genesis with the 22nd of Revelation.

And now look at the two most prominent features in the two pictures of the perfect state—the tree of life and the pure flowing river. These also will suggest to us some useful Christian thoughts.

What is this tree of life? We cannot, I think, know the exact explanation of what is meant by this tree of life described in Genesis. We are told certainly, by what is said of it, that in the first paradise eternal life, and all the spiritual food that conduces to it and sustains it, was placed within reach of the first pair. It is remarkable that God does not, it seems, forbid Adam and Eve to eat of the fruit of this tree of life, and yet they seem not to have eaten of it; they chose knowledge of evil, and neglected the means of everlasting happiness. But there is much that is mysterious, which I do not suppose man will ever be able with his present information to clear up, as to the exact meaning of the whole description of the first paradise. Who will venture to draw the limits here between figure and fact? In the New Jerusalem, however, the fruit of the tree of life is, obviously enough, simply the emblem of that spiritual food for the soul which God in Christ will give without stint to the redeemed. The

fruit of the tree in Revelation is described as fresh every month, to show that, when their conflict is ended, the enjoyment of ever-fresh spiritual life shall be secured to the redeemed for ever. Again, the very leaves of the tree are said to be for the healing of the nations. Perhaps this means, so full of the power of life is the tree, that even what drops from it has a healing influence. The redeemed eat of the fruit, and the sickly nations—sick from sin and misery—experience a healing influence even from the leaves that casually fall upon them; so rich in blessings is that source of spiritual food which God has prepared in Christ for the redeemed. Or perhaps the image is this: the leaves grow first, while it is still but spring-time, and not yet the glorious summer of Christ's second coming; and the sickly nations are healed by the leaves from their disease of sin. And at last, when the eternal summer comes, and Christ with it, and the tree of life ripens fully, then they who have been healed by the leaves are made partakers of the full enjoyment of the fruit, and have it ever fresh to eternity. There is no great difficulty in understanding all that is said of the tree of life in Revelation. How does it stir our thoughts, while we hunger after earthly good things, to think of those better things which Christ keeps to satisfy the redeemed soul!

And again—the river, the full, gushing, clear river. In the 2nd of Genesis we find it parting into four streams when it leaves Paradise, and running over all the earth, and riches and blessings seem to follow where it flows. You will see this in the verses which describe the four rivers. Whatever else this may mean, it seems to point out that all the blessings which this world knows have their source in the Paradise of God. If there be found any blessing, any fertility in the

world after the Fall, it is from the overflowing of that living stream which was given in man's first perfect state in inexhaustible abundance. All the grand thoughts and deeds of men in the old heathen days—they could not have been formed had it not been for the overflowings of this river of God. In the Revelation, on the contrary, the question is no more as to the way in which the living waters can reach the dry and barren lands of a sinful world. They are spoken of merely as ever flowing for the refreshment and to secure the perfect purity of the Redeemed in the Holy City when the world has ceased to be barren and sinful. And the source of all this refreshment and purity is mentioned. The river comes straight from below the throne of God and of the Lamb. So much in explanation of the tree and the river in these two passages.

Besides these two pictures of the perfect state at the beginning and end of the Bible, we have many glimpses of this same state granted to cheer men's hearts in the weary days of trial. While men's hearts are borne down by the sight of the sin and misery that is around them, God grants them refreshment by looking back or by looking forward—back to Paradise, forward to the New Jerusalem. To look back might have been but to increase man's misery; for it is no comfort to know that we have lost a glorious birthright if we feel that it is lost past recovery. But in the Lord Jesus Christ the hope and promise is secured for every soul which will seek Him faithfully—that all which has been lost shall be recovered: God now offers to us all in Christ, to be restored to what was lost for us in Adam. Hence to look back to Paradise is no longer sorrowful for those who know that God has secured for them the means of restoration. It is well to

note then, in illustration of our text, and the passage with which we have compared it, that holy men, whom the Spirit of God has visited, have ever rejoiced so to look both back and forward. Even the ignorant heathen were continually recalling, though far more in sadness than in hope, what traditions they could find in the mass of their fables of a happy golden age, before there was any toil or misery. But the enlightened servants of God, taught by His Holy Spirit, when they recall such traditions, look confidently to the future. Such thoughts cheer faithful Christian hearts amongst ourselves now; they cheered them in the Apostles' days of persecution (2 Peter iii. 13). "Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness." And in the old days, long before St. Peter, the ancient seers reproduced continually old traditions of the past in their bright visions of what God was to give them through the Messiah in the days to come. Thus, out of many in Isaiah, read his vision of the Lord's holy mountain, ch. xi. v. 6. It certainly recalls images naturally suggested by the traditions of the old Paradise, and applies them to the Messiah's coming victory and the reign of perfect peace. "The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together"—these, and all the other images of a time of perfect peace, are taken from recollections of Paradise, while they point forward to happy days to come, when "they shall not hurt nor destroy in all God's holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea." Thus also the 47th chapter of Ezekiel has a strong resemblance in its imagery to the 22nd of Revelation. The Prophet is describing the vision which he had of the rebuild-

ing of the city and temple of God, after the Babylonish captivity; and his mind is carried on to a far better restoration than that of the existing Temple and the first Jerusalem. Partly he sees the gradual restoration of the world by the growing of the Gospel kingdom, and partly he passes on in vision to the same bright image of the last perfect restoration which St. John saw: and the fresh water and the tree of life, as described in the 21st and 22nd of Revelation, appear as the emblems of the coming restoration in this 47th chapter of Ezekiel, connecting his description both with Genesis and with Revelation, as v. 1, "Behold waters issued out from under the threshold of the house (of God)." And then, as the prophet is led on by his heavenly guide, he finds the waters swelling to a great flood (v. 5)—"It was a river that I could not pass over. And when I had returned, behold at the bank of the river very many trees on the one side and on the other." v. 8: "And he said unto me, These waters issue out . . . and go down into the desert, and go into the sea; which being brought forth into the sea, the waters shall be healed. And it shall come to pass that everything that liveth, which moveth, whithersoever the rivers shall come, shall live." v. 12: "And by the river, upon the bank thereof, on this side and on that side, shall grow all trees for meat, whose leaf shall not fade, neither shall the fruit thereof be consumed: it shall bring forth new fruit according to his months, because their waters they issued out of the sanctuary; and the fruit thereof shall be for meat, and the leaf thereof for medicine." Here are the very same images, both as to the water and the tree of life, which we find in St. John's vision.

There is no time to examine further how like thoughts and like images of the beautiful and happy kingdom of

Christ, the restoration of Eden, cheered faithful souls in all ages. Let us end with one simple reflection for ourselves. The same thoughts must be often in our minds if we are real Christians. The din and trouble and the pleasures of life hold most of us so fast, and do so tie us down to the poor, wretched things around us, that we have little inclination to think either of Paradise or the New Jerusalem. But our thoughts must, by the Holy Spirit's help, be freed and raised, if we are to be waiting for Christ and serving Him—if we are to hold intercourse with Him in quiet meditation—and if we are to have any pleasure in the truths He teaches. Let us pray that our thoughts may be thus raised, while we become daily more familiar with the Bible images.

It is a great blessing that the images which, in the passages now before us, God's word has hallowed, to give us holy thoughts, are so very simple—the tree of life and the water of life. Surely, unless we are besotted, we must think of these whenever we look forth upon the country in this summer season. In many a landscape the flowing river is the boldest feature; the trees are now every day putting forth new beauty around us. God grant us, through these common natural objects, to rise to serious and purifying thoughts of Christ's Gospel; while we call to mind the blessedness which man once enjoyed, which he lost through sin, and to which he has promises of again rising if he is faithful to his Lord and Saviour.

XIII.—THE FIRST TEMPTATION.

GENESIS iii. 6.

“And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.”

PERHAPS there is no chapter in the Bible which has been more exposed to the cavils of the half-wise than this. It gives us the account of the temptation and fall of the first pair, and there are circumstances in that account which not unnaturally appear to men of this nineteenth century to be grotesque, unworthy, they foolishly say, of the majesty of the great subject which the chapter handles. The chapter, they say, handles the great mystery of all religion—how evil came into the world; and the history of this matter here given, some are bold to say, is childish. No, it is not childish. God hath chosen the foolish things of this world to confound those who are wise in their own conceits. And I believe a young child, or a humble unlettered man or woman of the poor, will often, while this chapter is read, learn from it lessons of deep heavenly philosophy which are plainly conveyed in the midst of its simple imagery, and which it will argue a shallow mind if we overlook, because, on a superficial view, the imagery, through which these lessons are conveyed, seems somewhat grotesque. If there is any one of us who has ever felt a difficulty himself on account of this imagery,

while we read, for example, of temptation by the serpent, the serpent speaking, the nature of the thing forbidden, viz. eating of fruit, and the described effects of eating it, or, if we have heard others object, even with ridicule, to these things, though we find no difficulty in them ourselves, let me bespeak your attention now to one or two points which may have as yet escaped your observation, which, well considered, may strengthen your own faith, or remove difficulties that impede the faith of others.

Without doubt there is much shallow infidelity in the world; many young persons are led astray by it, because it has a show of wisdom. And we, as earnest disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, are bound to do all we can to remove anything that may be a stumbling-block in our brother's way. Consider what a miserable thing it is if a man is ever led to ridicule or to think or speak lightly of the Scriptures of God, seeing how closely all our hopes of salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ are bound up with these Scriptures. There is no man, who has any serious thoughts, who does not feel that in a very short time all earthly supports and comforts must fail him. Unless he is mad, he does not wish, when death comes in awful reality, to be left comfortless; and I know of nothing that can give him comfort then but the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now the Gospel of the Lord Jesus is, we say, interwoven with all the books of Holy Scripture. Any thoughtful man must grant that it is a very serious thing to have our reverent view of Holy Scripture at all shaken. Perhaps then even for our own sakes, certainly for the sake of the souls of many who are being seduced around us, it is well to have the misapprehensions dissipated

on which cavils against this history of the Fall will be found to rest.

First then I will call to mind a weighty thought, well set forth in Calvin's Commentary on this 3rd chapter of Genesis. Consider who the persons were for whose immediate instruction God caused Moses to write this book. They were not self-satisfied philosophers of this nineteenth century, though we shall find that there is very much in the book admirably suited to teach these. They were not men in our stage of civilization at all. They were the wandering Jewish tribes, but now escaped from degrading slavery in Egypt. Not only does the book of Genesis describe the world's infancy, but God caused it to be written in the first instance for men in the childhood of civilization. Now every sacred book, as well as merely human books, must in its style and imagery have much that is peculiar from its fitness to meet the wants of those for whom it was first written. Be sure that anything which may have proved a stumbling-block in the imagery of this history of the Fall, to educated men of the eighteenth or nineteenth century after Christ, was no stumbling-block to the wandering tribes of Jews in the Arabian desert, to whom Moses taught heavenly truth through its poetic imagery, in the only form which as yet their minds were able to receive. Nay, of the three thousand years and more which have passed since this book of Genesis was written, we may safely say there have not been three hundred during which men's minds have been in such a state of civilization as to feel any of the difficulties of which the cavils we have mentioned speak. Even at this moment how very few are they throughout the

human race to whom the poetic form of the Scripture account of the Fall is not a recommendation rather than a difficulty! Could the child, think you, ever understand its deep lessons of heavenly wisdom if presented in a dry abstract form?

My friends, God has caused the Bible to be written for all ages of the world, for nations in all conditions of civilization, for very young children, and for the unlettered poor, as much as for the educated; and no really thoughtful man will ever feel himself unable to gather lessons of deep heavenly wisdom from its pages, because they speak in language well calculated to arrest the thoughts of the simplest and least educated.

“Moses,” says Calvin in the passage to which I have referred, “suits his mode of teaching to the capacity of those whom God employed him to teach: not only was it an unlearned multitude that he had to teach, but the Church when he wrote was still in its boyhood There is nothing strange then if he feeds with milk those whom we know and allow, from the age in which they lived, to have been as it were children. Or,” Calvin continues, “to use another image, there is no blame surely for Moses, if, considering that God has given him the office of a schoolmaster, he uses those rudiments which were suited to the boyish age he had to teach. He who despises this simplicity, condemns God’s whole system and economy in the government of his Church.” Truly the simplicity of these chapters, seeing that deep lessons of heavenly wisdom are veiled beneath their simple form, only the more reminds us that they came from Him who loves simple children and the simple poor, and by whom the souls of simple rude people, in an unlettered age, are held as dear

and as worthy to be brought near to Christ and washed in His blood, as those of the most learned and refined.

And now, taking this remark with us, it may be well to consider distinctly in detail what is the account of the fall of man given in this 3rd chapter of Genesis. It will be well for us to examine carefully the actual teaching of the chapter, and treat it quite apart from any human additions of fable or poetry which may have grown round it, and to which we may have become so accustomed in the writings of uninspired men, that we find a difficulty in separating the human addition from the Divine original as given by Moses.

It must be an interesting subject for us Christians, who hope to be saved from sin by the blood of our Redeemer, to know distinctly what God has revealed as to the way in which sin first came amongst us. That sin is in the world now is a plain matter of experience. All men see it—even the most worldly. If they do not see their own sins, they are shortsighted enough in seeing those of others. Christians feel the evil of sin, and deeply deplore it in their own hearts. It is their constant feeling of it which makes them constantly dependent on Christ their Saviour.

Let us examine, then, what God teaches as to how sin came amongst us. May God, for Jesus Christ's sake, lead us through the simple lessons given in this chapter better to understand the cunning deadly power of sin, and more to throw ourselves on Him, through whose cross and passion alone we can be freed from it. Remark, however, that in the account of this chapter we have no solution of the great difficulty of all religion—how evil first arose. This is the mystery of mysteries, which God keeps quite concealed. Moses shows

us that evil was in existence before it reached man. In this account he only tells us how it spread from other beings, who were suffering under it, to the hitherto pure and happy race of man.

When the first man and woman were created, they found themselves in a perfectly happy state. They did not know what evil was, and were quite free from it. God, their Creator, was in the habit of holding continual intercourse with them, revealing Himself to them in the most familiar way. All this Moses sets before us in what he tells us of Paradise, and of Adam and Eve hearing the voice of the Lord God walking, as he figuratively terms it, in the Garden in the cool of the day. It was, indeed, a blessed state in which the first man and woman at first lived—a state very different from any which the world has seen since, though not more different from our present state than that to which we believe the human race of living souls will come at last in Christ, when the world's history is ended.

But mark the difference between our present state and that to which (unless we are utter unbelievers) we suppose death will admit us. Our individual life is very different at different stages even of our earthly being, and how great the difference between the earthly and the unseen state! Why should we suppose it remarkable that the different stages of the being of our race should be more unlike than the different stages of the being of the individual? All who believe that the world has had a beginning and will have an end, must believe that both the beginning and the end are states quite miraculous: the order of our present nature began in the Creation, and will end with Christ's second coming. All the circum-

stances, then, of both these events must be quite beyond the ordinary course of nature.

We shall not, then, find any difficulty in Moses' account of man's earliest state, because much in it is quite unlike the present order of things natural. The blessedness of Eden must have been miraculous heavenly blessedness. But Moses goes on to set before us, that even in this blessed state at the beginning there was a possibility of falling. Now, the happiness to which the redeemed soul hopes to rise in Christ will be greater than that which we lost in Adam; for from the redeemed state at last there will be no falling. In the first state there was a possibility of falling. God from the first left the human will free. The will, not yet tested, was liable to go wrong. This would seem to be the very nature of a free will in its early stage. At last, when the soul of a Christian, redeemed through Christ, has passed through many trials, its freedom, fully tested, will, in God's infinite mercy, through the working of the Holy Spirit, be so at one with the mind of God, that it can never fall again. This is the perfection of a free will, matured to lose itself, through grace, in the holy will of God. But it seems as if this could not be its condition in its early untested state. Thus, for the perfectly happy and innocent beings in Paradise, there was, I think we may say necessarily, still a possibility of falling. This consideration as to the nature of a free will, though it cannot solve the difficulties of the case, may at least give us some useful thoughts in answer to the question, which the account of the Fall forces on us, Why did God allow man to be tempted at all? Perhaps this liability to fall was of the very essence of a free will, not yet matured through trial.

Moses, however, is commissioned merely to give us the fact, without explaining it, that man in his first perfect state was liable to temptation. Remembering for what sort of persons he was writing, Moses does not attempt—he was not commissioned—to clear up abstruse difficulties.

Now, the will of man being thus free, God chose a very simple and easily-resisted trial by which to test its faithfulness and bring it onwards to maturity. It was no great and difficult thing that he required of the first man and woman: the test was merely this, whether in their free will the happy pair would be contented, in a matter in itself indifferent, to obey their Father and best friend, simply because He desired them. There was no difficulty in obedience, or, if they found any difficulty, the Lord Himself—a tried and loving friend—was at hand to give them strength.

Moses sets before us the nature of the test of obedience which God chose, in the following form:—In the midst of the early abode of man there grew two trees. The one is called the tree of life. Remember, as we have said, in this condition of our race at the world's commencement all things were, so to speak, miraculous. Moses may mean that this tree of life may have been a tree of wonderful healing and sustaining powers, far beyond what the world has ever known since; and the other tree, which grew beside it, we may suppose, was full of baleful poisonous influence. Even to this day there are many such trees in various countries very injurious to man's health. God therefore, in kindness, warned the first man and woman not to touch it. But the peculiarity of the tree, as set forth in Scripture, is not from anything in its own nature, but from the use for which God employed it. The eating or not eating of it—a

thing in itself morally indifferent—was to be the test of man's obedience. Moses' account leads us to infer that it became wrong and a moral evil to eat of this tree simply because God said *Thou shalt not*. The tree of knowledge of good and evil, it is thought, received its name long afterwards, not from any properties inherent in the tree itself, but from the effects that followed from the eating of its fruit. To be perfectly innocent is not to know what sin is. The knowledge of what sin is comes from the commission of sin. Man knew evil as soon as he disobeyed God; but he could not know what it was till then. But to return. God—Moses sets before us—had pointed to this tree and said, “Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die.” And the innocent beings whom God had made had no desire to eat of it: they loved Him, and had no wish to do what He forbade them. A blessed state truly they enjoyed, with all bodily good things around them and God very near them, and no unruly desires, living in quiet contented obedience, and with full exercise, in their intercourse with God, for the highest faculties of which the human soul is capable. This, and neither more nor less, is what Moses tells us of man's first state.

But now a new agent comes into the scene, ch. iii. v. 1:—“Now the serpent,” Moses writes, “was more subtle than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made.” From comparing together several passages of the New Testament,* we shall probably come to the conclusion that our Lord and his Apostles teach that under the name and likeness of this serpent is represented the great evil spirit, the enemy of

* 2 Cor. ii. 11; 2 Cor. xi. 3, 13, 14; Rom. xvi. 20; St. John viii. 44; Revel. xii. 9, xx. 2.

mankind. It is remarkable certainly that Moses does not say this. He speaks simply of the serpent as the tempter, without referring to any spiritual agency. Evidently it is not his intention to refer directly to Satan. The doctrine of the evil spirit's power is not a part of the teaching which Moses was employed to reveal. And here note that perhaps in speaking merely of the serpent as the tempter, Moses more strikingly sets forth the recklessness of Eve's sin in that she was led astray by what appeared to her nothing more than one of those low animals over which God had given her dominion, by which it was shameful for her to be led.

Is there not, my friends, a great moral here—both in Moses' plain account of the temptation, and in that which we gather from comparing it with other Scriptures? Does Moses represent Eve as tempted and led astray by this low animal? How like is she in this to all her sons and daughters! How continually, from our sinful weakness, do those things over which God has given us dominion, gain power over us to our soul's hurt! Those who lead us astray are often not the great and the powerful—not those to whose controlling influence we are subjected, but those over whom we ourselves ought to rule. Often the temptation which is ruinous to us comes to us from something less noble even than the lower animals; something that is without life at all is powerful to endanger us. How powerful to destroy many thousand souls has been the shining dross of a little gold: and our desires—how often are men of the highest powers enslaved by those of them which they have in common with the lowest beasts! There is a great moral truth in Moses' picture of Eve falling by the temptation of

this low animal. She is set forth in this as the visible symbol of the miserable weakness of all her race.

And, again, the other view, which sees Satan in the serpent, has also its great moral. All outward things that lead us astray are his instruments. He, the enemy of our souls, speaks ever by the lips of cunning tempters of our own kind. It is he who uses the beauty and desirableness of all things that lead us astray to suggest thoughts that may be the ruin of our souls. So in this part of the picture of the Fall—both as simply set before us by Moses, and as explained hundreds of years afterwards—there are many useful thoughts.

We proceed with the account before us. It would be vain to ask whether, in the latter clause of the 1st verse and in the 4th and 5th verses, Moses intends to represent the serpent as actually speaking to Eve with human voice. Those who look upon the chapter as containing more or less of allegory will have no difficulty in supposing the statement to be distinctly made that the serpent thus spoke. Others may understand that he is represented as using words, only more vividly to set forth in a figure the thoughts which his alluring gestures as he approached the tree suggested to Eve's now wavering heart. These are doubtful points as to Moses' meaning which no criticism can certainly decide. What the picture clearly sets before us is, that the mother of our race, with every motive for obedience, and every help to keep her upright, was led into an act of disobedience to God's distinct command by a very mean and contemptible seducer, whom other Scriptures teach that Satan, the arch enemy of mankind, employed.

There is no time to dwell further on this picture here.

Note only in conclusion, that, as soon as Eve desires to disobey God, doubts are represented creeping into her mind as to whether the threatened punishment will really follow disobedience. v. 4: "The serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die." Nay, perhaps great good will follow from this little act of disobedience. v. 5: "Your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods." The fond fool listens, half doubting, half believing, to these suggestions; but note, after all, it is not these that really move her; they are the signs, not the causes of her yielding. She falls as all her sons and daughters have fallen since—not really deceived by false reasonings, but overpowered by strong desire—desire which might have easily been resisted at first, but which has grown every moment stronger, while she madly listened to the tempter's lies. She yields at last, simply from the love of the forbidden pleasure.

Read the text. v. 6: "And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat." And then she is not contented with her own ruin, but must have her husband to share in it. Certainly, whatever scoffers may say of this narrative, there is in it a very deep insight into the nature of temptation, the way in which it leads to sin, how its strength grows, and how the seduced of one moment feels immediately the desire to be in turn a seducer. We shall do well to ponder all these particulars. We have here only pointed to them. Each of them is in itself a sermon.

And now, let us think before we close whether we may not gain from what we have examined thin is account of the Fall some plain and searching lesson for ourselves.

The account of the Fall, as we have seen, is not only a narrative of what is past—of what took place, once for all, many thousand years ago; it is a symbolical picture also, from what took place then, of dangers which surround us still. We are no longer, like the first pair, in the paradise of God; but it has pleased Him to cast the lot of all of us here present in that substitute which He has given for paradise while the world lasts in its ruined and sinful state, viz., in the Church of Christ. Driven out from the first paradise, and waiting till our Saviour's coming for the revelation of the second, we here present have still not been left to perish in a barren wilderness. Through the infinite mercy of our Saviour, we have been bred in Christ's Church. We live with a thousand spiritual privileges around us—with the Lord God ready, in the person of His Son and through the working of His Holy Spirit, to hold communion with us and help us every day. Truly, compared with the heathen world around us, this is to be in paradise: as to spiritual privileges at least, it is a sort of paradise in which God has placed us, having called us to the knowledge of His Son. There is enough—far more than enough—of misery and sin to remind us that we are deeply fallen; but there is enough also of gracious spiritual privileges freely offered in Jesus Christ to save us from the evils of the Fall. Now, in this sheltered spot, in which God through Christ has placed us, the scene of the old temptation is every day re-enacted in our case: it is re-enacted in all its particulars which we have narrated; and we are in danger every day of falling, from evil thoughts suggested to us from without; but such thoughts have no power unless they are met by a yielding heart within. What in the account before us ought Eve to have done as soon as

the tempter suggested evil thoughts to her? Resist the devil, and he will flee from thee. She ought then to have called at once on the Lord God, her ever-ready friend. He would at once have come and saved her, and the tempter would have fled. All the evil that followed might have been averted by one hearty prayer at first. Keep this in mind, all of us. The tempter is cunning, and on the watch; and to listen to him is to yield. The Lord God is with us in the Lord Jesus Christ; and He is ready to save to the uttermost if we call to Him for strength.

XIV.—E N O C H.

GENESIS v. 24.

“ And Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him.”

THERE is something very striking in those glimpses which the book of Genesis gives us into the early history of man. They are but glimpses. A deep mist, spreading thick darkness, had gathered over the morning of those early ages. Men in general knew almost nothing of them, and were lost in vague conjectures or mere fancies when they tried to picture to themselves what had been the first beginnings of the race, and who were the fathers of very old times from whom they were themselves sprung. We can easily understand the natural curiosity which made man anxious, if possible, to gain some information on such matters. When we come ourselves upon the almost obliterated remains of some ancient building, of the history of which we know nothing, or catch faint traces of unintelligible writing on the rocks that overhang our streams, or think of old names which have been given to the places we live in, evidently by men who used quite a different language from that which is spoken amongst us now, we all feel something of a like curiosity, and we desire, if we can, to lift the veil which hides the old days from us, and to learn something of the men so long forgotten, who once, full of life, moved where we now move.

Now, common history can help an educated man to gain some knowledge of those comparatively modern times, which we reckon very ancient—for six or seven hundred years with us make a very ancient date. But the really ancient times, thousands of years back, when the race of man was but lately settled on the earth, and when, so far as we can judge, there existed no means of handing down the account of one age to another by writing—of these no common history can give us any information. And therefore we turn with the greater interest to this very old book of Genesis—and is it not the oldest with which we are acquainted?—which God empowered his servant Moses to write for the very purpose of giving men some knowledge of what must otherwise have been altogether lost and unknown.

God, by the book of Genesis, has here and there made, as it were, openings in the mists which had settled so thickly over the early centuries of man's being. He has not thought fit to give us any minute account of these early times. The history of them which He caused Moses to write for us is very unlike the detailed history of a later age. As to the times before the Flood, He has, as it were, only caused the gigantic forms of the ancient fathers of our race to pass one after another before us as if seen dimly in a vision: but still in that brief and poetic history there are truths revealed of the greatest value, and bright pictures here and there, to let us see distinctly what man's nature was, and what his relations to God and his fellow-men, from the earliest times.

Now, among the many points which deeply interest us in the book of Genesis is the marked distinction drawn from the first, as ever since, between the children of God and the chil-

dren of this world. And here, in the verse before us, we have mention made of one of the patriarchs of our race, on whose memory the faithful in after ages have taken a peculiar pleasure in dwelling, as most truly a servant of God. "Enoch walked with God, and was not, for God took him." All that is given us of his history is summed up in very few words; but twice over (vv. 22 and 24) in the little that is said of him we are told "he walked with God." This is a notable expression: it is found again in the next chapter, v. 9. Concerning Noah, of whom we are told, v. 8, that he found grace in the eyes of the Lord, we read,—“And Noah walked with God.” It is an expression full of meaning. Enoch, like Abraham in after times, was the friend of God: he had a continual calm experience of God’s presence with him, and lived always as in his sight. And then we are told of the blessed end of this blessed life,—“He was not, for God took him.”

No wonder that these simple words should have laid a firm hold on the thoughts of men in after times. The peculiarity of the words and expression as to the end of Enoch’s life—“He was not, for God took him”—is explained in the 11th chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, v. 5:—“By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God.”

Let us now consider, first, the nature of the blessing which God awarded to this faithful servant as his peculiar privilege in the end of his life—“He was not, for God took him;” and, 2ndly, the sort of life he led, which made him be deemed worthy of this privilege—“He walked with God.”

I. The words of the text say, “He was not; for God took

him." These words, considered by themselves, might naturally enough be supposed to point out nothing more than that at last, by a very easy death, Enoch glided out of life without any of the pain and misery of dying ; that, as he had lived so faithfully, God, in his case, reduced the penalty of Adam's unfaithfulness to the lowest possible amount of suffering ; that to the end he went about his daily business in the love and fear of God ; and at last, when men came to call him, as at other times, they found him not, for he had glided away, by the easiest of all possible departures, and God had taken him. This might very well have been supposed by us to be the meaning of the remarkable words ; but from very early times it was felt that there was something more in them than this. From very early times men learned to interpret the words not of an easy death, but of Enoch's having been saved from death altogether. And this is the interpretation which the Epistle to the Hebrews has stamped upon the words. In Enoch's case, God has shown that, as death is the penalty of sin, so certainly it is no light privilege to be saved from the trials and the weakness that beset our mortal flesh in dying.

It would be wrong in us to judge of the degree in which any one amongst ourselves has lived a life of faith and walked with God in the days of his health by the ease or the suffering of his death-bed. This depends on a hundred circumstances of mere bodily strength ; but still it is well for us to call to mind that God, for His people who are faithful in Jesus Christ, does, as a general rule, wonderfully lessen the misery of dying. Of course, I do not mean that the faithful now-a-days are to be saved, like Enoch, from the languor of long sickness or the sharp struggles of dissolution ;

but in the Lord Jesus Christ they have a physician at hand who applies balm to their wounds. Though earthly physicians may be unable to give them any ease, often God gives them in the midst of suffering the calmness of a spirit which rests in full confidence on a merciful Saviour. And thus the very worst of human evils, while it cannot but bow and afflict their bodies, loses its power to harass their souls. Thus God, to this day, in such cases, gives a calm departure to those who have walked with Him.

It is not denied that quietness in dying is often the portion of the least faithful. There are some forms of death which come so suddenly that there is no time in them for disquietude before all of death the human eye can see is over. There are other deaths in which wicked men pass out of life in the quietness of a hardened conscience. In these cases, let it be remembered that it is only a part of death which can be seen by surviving friends. When the eye of the dead man closes, and his bodily frame is senseless, then begins for the faithless the worst of death's terrors. These wait for him on the threshold of the land of darkness, to which no human eye can follow him. And then it is (if Christ's word stands firm) that the blessedness of a faithful life is most truly felt. "When I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me ; thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me."

Certainly, for those who have been long faithful to God in Christ through life, death has no pain and terrors but those which are inseparable from our fleshly nature, and the moment they have left the flesh the faithful are in peace ; when for the faithless begins that unseen agony of dying which is the sting of death and the foretaste of never-ending suffering.

Certainly, then, though the faithful cannot look to enjoy the privilege of being spared death and taken to God without dying, yet, for all who walk with God in life, death, however gloomy, is really robbed of its terrors. When they have passed it, they will look back upon it as nothing but the means by which God takes them.

“Enoch walked with God, and was not; for God took him.” “He was not found, because God had translated him; for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God.” These words of the text and of the 11th of the Hebrews naturally suggest some such thoughts as to the way in which God saves those who have long walked with Him from misery in dying.

Again; look at this expression, applied to Enoch’s case—God took him—in another point of view. Is not the whole account of Enoch’s going out of life, both in the text and in the 11th of the Hebrews, well fitted to set before us this great truth—that the more a man walks with God in faith, the more is the separation between this world and the next bridged over; the more does life on earth become the first stage of that eternal life which is made perfect in God’s immediate presence in heaven?

It is not well that we should look upon the life of the faithful on earth as something altogether separate from their life in heaven. In Enoch’s case the two lives were blended in one. It was but as if he had passed the two parts of his one life in two different centuries. He had been for the long term of his earthly years absent from his soul’s home, and God called him home by the easiest possible journey, and the good desires with which his soul was filled by the Holy Spirit on earth were not changed when they

found their fulfilment in God's presence in heaven. The saint had the very same pursuits and pleasures before and after God took him. All the change which befel him was that he dropped the weakness and sufferings of the body, and was removed from the company of the wicked, who vexed his righteous soul; and the life begun on earth went on perfected in heaven.

The same thing is in a degree true of all God's faithful people. Their life which the Holy Spirit enables them to lead here is the beginning of their life in heaven. They are the only men whose pursuits will not be interrupted by death; for their pursuits on earth are such as God Himself delights in, and the holy angels and the saints around His throne; and therefore these pursuits of theirs will be continued and made perfect where He dwells. How different is this from the account we have to give of those short-lived pleasures of sense and sin, of mere worldly employment or worldly pleasure, on which so very many spend all their energies. These must end with death; and the man who has sought them as his chief good must at death enter into misery; for all the means of happiness he knows of have escaped from his grasp in dying.

II. And this brings us to our second point; to consider, viz., the sort of life which Enoch led for which he was deemed worthy of such high privileges.

He walked with God. How much there is in these simple words! The Jews held Enoch to have been a prophet. Hence St. Jude speaks of a prophecy of his handed down by some tradition amongst the Jews:—v. 14: "Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied, saying, Behold the Lord cometh with ten thousand of His saints,"—v. 15: "To execute

judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him."

But it is not in that he possessed any wonderful power as a prophet that he is spoken of in Genesis as having been the friend of God. It is not on account of any wonderful power given to him beyond what other men may receive that he was so pleasing to God. The Jews, who were fond of dwelling on the character and fate of Enoch, could not doubt that he was a prophet. In the passage of their traditions quoted by St. Jude, they represent him as prophesying of the day of God's coming, surrounded by His saints, to give them perfect happiness and to execute judgment on the wicked. And they naturally supposed him to have sustained his soul, amid the trials which he suffered from the evil tongues of those amongst whom he lived, by looking forward to that day, when all the hard speeches which ungodly sinners had spoken against God and his saints should come back upon themselves. And the prophecy thus attributed by the Jews to Enoch may well show us what they justly enough thought the life of faith to be: a life in which the man who walked with God looked always forward to the day when God would rescue His people from all evil, and overwhelm all who had opposed them with shame. The substance, therefore, of the prophecy thus attributed to Enoch is well worth our noting, as showing the sort of thoughts which must have been often in his mind. But it is not in that he was a prophet that he is set before us as having so pleased God; not because he had prophetic power, but because he lived in faith, as the 11th chapter of the Hebrews explains. And, after all, there is nothing so

well suited to set before us what his life was as the simple expression, twice repeated in his short history, "He walked with God."

Brethren, if we would be partakers of that joy which he and all the faithful know ; if we would have death cease to be any evil for us ; if we would have our life on earth the beginning of a life in heaven ; if we would learn to look forward to the day of God's judgment without any fear, and would be sustained amidst any contradictions and hard speeches which we may meet with in the world, let us strive, not in words only and theory, but in our practice, to know what it is to walk with God.

If we are walking with God, He is our friend. He is often in our thoughts. We lean on Him. We pray to Him. We keep near to Him by His sacraments and every other means of grace. We try in all questions of right and wrong to be guided by Him, seeking to know His will from His Holy Word. We never deliberately allow ourselves in any course of life, or in any words and acts, in which we know that we cannot ask the pure and holy God to watch us and, as it were, take part with us in what we do and say. God's Holy Spirit enables the faithful thus to walk with God ; and when they fall into forgetfulness and wander from Him, though it be but for a brief space and only in their thoughts, they are filled with deep sorrow. By the same spirit their consciences are pricked, and they are urged to make haste to return to Him. They cannot live without God by night or by day, for God in Jesus Christ is indeed in all their thoughts, and hence their life is peaceful, for they are kept always near to the God of peace.

We may know what it is to walk with God by think-

ing how the wicked and worldly live without God in the world. It is of the last importance that we should know whether we are walking with God or living without God. Without God is without hope ; and a man is without God if God is not in all his thoughts. Not the profane only, the drunkard, the debauched—these, of course, are without God, and the wrath of God abides upon them—but even the respectable, the regular, the highly esteemed, if they are thinking of the world in all they do, if God in Jesus Christ is not the great object of all their thoughts, the guide of all their actions—if He is not loved and honoured by them as their best friend—are without God, and, therefore, while they continue so, without hope : And how miserable is the weakness of the best of us, how great the temptation to wander. God grant more and more of His Holy Spirit to the very best, for the soul that wanders away from Him must end in misery. There is no walking in security unless we walk with God, through Jesus Christ, in a consistent life of real Christian principle.

XV.—A B R A H A M.

GENESIS xxv. 8.

“Then Abraham gave up the ghost, and died in a good old age, an old man, and full of years, and was gathered to his people.”

THIS text is well suited to call to our minds one very important peculiarity of the early books of the Old Testament. In this verse Abraham, the great covenant-head of the Jewish race, is spoken of much as any good old man would be spoken of amongst ourselves:—“He died in a good old age, an old man and full of years, and was gathered to his people.” Very many of the things we are told of Abraham, as well as of the other worthies of these historical books, raise them, as it were, to a totally different atmosphere from that which sustains our life. Not only do they seem to be shrouded from us by the mists of antiquity, and thus to assume colossal forms while we gaze at their dim outline, but also they are certainly represented as admitted to privileges in those dark days of old to which we cannot aspire, with all the light of a highly advanced civilization. God, in the early ages of the human race, was certainly at times more visibly, if not more really, near to men than He is now. It is right that we should note this, that we should understand how we have distinct historical records of a time when God manifested Himself more clearly than He does now. But it is right also that we should note the opposite phase—that these men—so dimly to be traced, so highly privileged in

what we can trace respecting them—are no imaginary characters raised above human nature, in the uncertain or adoring recollections of a grateful posterity, but that in their day they lived, felt, acted, sinned, repented, died, even like ourselves: that if they had great privileges granted to them, these privileges, though they might differ in form, were really the same in substance which are open to ourselves. This phase of the sacred history is, we say, much to be noted, if we would avoid a dreamy, unreal way of reading Holy Scripture, if we would have brought home to our hearts and practice the plain lessons of religion which it teaches for us even in these its oldest books, telling of times when society was most unlike our own. Here in the text we read, Abraham “died in a good old age, an old man and full of years, and was gathered to his people.” The friend of God, the father of the faithful, died like any common man, and nothing can be more simple than this account of his death. Much of his life also is described in the same simple way, showing that, with all his privileges, he was distinctly one of ourselves, of the same passions, with the same weaknesses, tempted like us, having the same joys and sorrows, serving God in the midst of trials in the very same way which is open to each of ourselves.

Now we say it is good for us thus to contemplate the worthies of the first books of the Old Testament. There is felt to be a remarkable freshness in examples of life taken from those early times. To mention an instance in point—I suppose every one has been struck with this, while reading in our Marriage Service the prayer, “O God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob, bless these Thy servants, and sow the seed of eternal life in their hearts and as Thou

didst send Thy blessing upon Abraham and Sarah to their great comfort, so vouchsafe to send Thy blessing upon these Thy servants."

The instance thus brought before us in the service in which we dedicate the wedded pair to God, leads us to disentangle our life from the artificial conventionalities which straiten and confine us. We look back nearly four thousand years, to the tent of the wandering patriarch, for the example which is to teach us how to prize aright a holy, thoughtful, wedded love, lasting through a long life of many vicissitudes. Thus St. Peter's 2nd Epistle also, speaking to the women of its day, falls back on the same primitive example:—"After this manner" (that is, with the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit) "in the old time the holy women also who trusted in God adorned themselves, being in subjection to their own husbands, even as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him Lord, whose daughters ye are so long as ye do well."*

It is certainly a great help to us in endeavouring, with the aid of God's Spirit, to shape our lives and the lives of our families to the model which the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ approve, to have these old examples set before us with their simple, well-marked features, showing us what God has loved from the earliest age—Abraham's faith, his awful veneration in the presence of Him who, being his Maker, yet condescended to call Himself his friend; his care for his household and his kindred, and his bold zeal in their cause; and Sarah's simple life-long love to her husband, almost the only characteristic which comes forth in her unobtrusive life: and again, the trust Abraham reposed in his servant, and the trusted servant's faithfulness in return—these things stand

* 1 Peter iii. 6.

out in the record of the patriarch's common life, and speak of graces quite open to each of ourselves to imitate. God grant us by His Holy Spirit to profit by thinking of them! And then, in illustration of that faith with which the patriarch's name has become identified, it is striking to note, all through that long life of which we have this record, how earthly trials are borne lightly, from a reliance on the sure fulfilment of heavenly promises. We are encouraged, I say, to take Abraham's family life thus simply set before us as our example. Not that it has not its failings—great failings—which there is no attempt in the Sacred writer to conceal or gloss over: but with all its failings it is, upon the whole, a holy life, a life spent in the realized presence and friendship of God, and, as such, meet to be an example always for God's people.

But here some one will object that our examples had better be taken from distinctly Christian times. What need to go back some twenty centuries before Christ was known? What need, when we have Apostles of the New Testament, and a whole series of holy men and women adorning the Christian Church from their day to this, in circumstances far more like our own, to go back to the rude life of the wandering Chief, who was rescued, indeed, from the idolatry of his fathers by God's special providence, and had promises given him of Christ's deliverance, but who still could only see Christ very dimly a very great way off? Why take such a model, from which Christ Himself, the great centre of all examples, is wanting? To speak thus is to misunderstand wholly the teaching of the Bible. The Lord Jesus Christ is set forth in the Bible as a Saviour to the old fathers of our race as to us. They did not know, indeed, distinctly as we do,

the power of His atoning blood; they had not before them the bright example of His blameless earthly life: but we learn, from comparing the New Testament with the Old, that the Second Person of the blessed Trinity watched over them to save them, as He watches over us. With Abraham He spake on many occasions, God manifest in visible form. The records of the lives of these men would not have been preserved in the Church by God's providence, and moulded with the prophecies and the New Testament into one well-compacted whole, if they had not been full of many lessons for Christ's people. Nay, with respect to the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, these histories, examined by the light of the New Testament, have this especial force—that they show remarkably in Abraham's case how great strength of religious character, and what steadfastness and comfort in life and death, followed even from looking forward through the dim future to the fulfilment of the promises of a coming deliverance. And if Christ's salvation was thus powerful even at a distance, are we not led to ask, what ought it to be for us, when brought, as it now is, so very near? But is not the Lord Jesus Christ's power most strikingly manifested, if we regard it as reaching backward to strengthen and redeem those who lived and died long before the Christian era? All saints who ever lived are Christ's people. The Bible, taken as a whole, clearly sets this forth. No fear, then, that we forget the Lord Jesus Christ, or the saints of the New Testament, in the worthies of the Old. We rather admire the more the wondrous power of the Captain of our salvation, while we think what deeds were done through His strengthening influence even by the advanced vanguard of that great army of saints which He commands. Our fixed allegiance to the

Lord Jesus Christ, and His saving power, will never be interfered with by our seeing how even those who lived before He was manifested were strong in His power; for all human might in resisting sin comes from Him, the Lord.

Gazing then, my friends, as Scripture leads us, on Old Testament worthies for our example—feeling that they set forth with a wonderfully simple power graces which become the Christian character as much as that of the ancient worshipper of Jehovah—we are in no danger of overlooking the peculiarities of our distinct Christian calling.

And here it so happens in the particular case before us, that, in looking to the example of Abraham's family life, the two graces which are most, I think, forced on our admiration, are the most distinctly Christian—his ardent faith, his zealous love.

1st. His faith—Abraham's faith. Of this there is no doubt. Whenever the name of Abraham is mentioned we think of faith. It will be well for us to dwell on each of those characteristics of the patriarch—his faith and love—for his character shows both. His title is the Father of the faithful. St. Paul brings him forward as the great example to show how faith justifies. And if faith be the trusting in God, and in the certainty of His unseen protection and in the fulfilment of His distinct promises, rather than in any power of human strength which seems to be near us, where shall we find any better example of this grace? Each stage of Abraham's faithful life may help to guide us in our faith. Does he go forth at God's command, putting himself under the immediate unseen protection of God, and refusing any longer to trust himself in society, however dear, where God is not honoured? Genesis xii. 1-4: "The Lord

said unto Abraham, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee. So Abraham departed, as the Lord had spoken unto him." Very often has the experience of Christians called for similar sacrifices. The Christian's faith must be like his. We need not speak of missionaries who give up all goodly prospects at home that they may preach Christ's Gospel amongst outcast souls for whom He died, but who never heard of Him. Such men certainly go forth as Abraham did. But quietly in his degree each Christian, even while he remains in his home, must exercise similar acts of self-denying faith. There is indeed nothing morose or unduly exclusive in the way in which earnest Christians separate themselves from a world which has no love for Christ; yet each Christian must make up his mind as to what the society shall be with which he will cast in his lot. "Ye cannot serve God and mammon." You cannot love Christ and the society of those who are in no ways guided by Him, and have no thoughts of what His death has purchased for their souls. You cannot love Him and yet take your ease pleasantly amongst society that is estranged from Him. It may be necessary to make some great effort to free yourselves from the influence of companions who do not love Christ—efforts almost as great as that of Abraham when he left his father's house. In the common walks of life this is much to be thought of. In choosing where we are to live, what is to be our trade or profession, what rules we are to lay down as to our amusements, every man who is a real Christian will, above all things, desire to ascertain, first, what is God's will—what course will give us the best opportunities of serving Him. And wherever we move—whatever we do—

possessed like Abraham with the distinct conviction that the Lord is watching us, we shall follow where He guides, for faithful Christians know, even more surely than Abraham, that God is their friend in the Lord Jesus Christ, and if we only trust and follow Him He will keep us in all our ways. Thus Abraham's first great act of faith is an example, when he separated himself from the friends of his early home.

Again, it is of the essence of Abraham's faith that no discouragements or seeming improbabilities made him doubt that God's promises would be fulfilled in His good time. What Christian, whose life is prolonged to middle age, knows not how hard it is at times, amid trials, it may be, of poverty, or failing health, or loss of loved friends, or long-deferred hope, to feel convinced that God indeed worketh all things well, and has not forgotten to be gracious to us? There are many very hard trials of such a kind for those who love the Lord Jesus Christ. Take one for an example. It was hard for Abraham to bring himself to believe that in his son, of whose birth there was so little probability, all the nations of the earth should be blessed; and yet was he able to feel quiet trust in God, when, after that son's unexpected birth, he seemed to be commanded, according to the not unusual custom of his age, to deliver up to death the being on whom all his hopes centred. How often, my friends, are parents called in our own day to look to God in Christ, even in worse trials, when they can scarcely bring themselves to trust Him, with reference to their children. We speak not of the trial to faith which comes when God removes by death one beloved in whom all hopes of happiness seemed to centre. There are worse trials than this. A Christian parent feels it to be bitterer than his son's death when he sees him

falling into reckless courses as he grows to manhood, and wandering far from his Redeemer. Even in such trials the Christian, looking to Abraham, may learn quiet confidence in God when his heart is heaviest. The patriarch felt that God could raise up his son, even though he seemed utterly lost to him. Whatever befel he would not distrust God.

Again, is there not displayed all through Abraham's history a reverential sense of God's presence—a bowing of the heart and soul before Him when He appears, which is of the very essence of the highest Christian faith? This is simply set forth, for example, ch. xvii. v. 1: "The Lord appeared to Abraham, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect. And Abraham fell on his face, and God talked with him." All through his life we trace this deep reverence of a soul which knows that God is not far from him—which listens to catch his lowest accents, or recognise his features in the messengers he sends. Thus Abraham honours God, not in the angels only who come from the world above, but in the Priest-King Melchisedec. All who come to him with a message from God are welcomed and honoured if they are really God's messengers. And in the patriarch's distinct acts of worship, when he feels that God's presence is manifested, his is no devotion with outward gestures only, but comes straight from the heart. What more characteristic of the real Christian than thus to see and reverence God in Jesus Christ—listening to His Word—recognising in all who speak to us in His name the marks that they come from Him—being filled with reverential gladness when, either in the congregation or in secret worship, we feel that He reveals Himself as very near?

We need not stay to note further, as St. James does, how

all through his life Abraham's faith is not a mere matter of feeling, still less of words, but shows itself in consistent ready obedience. And he who believes really in God, manifested through Christ, not only listens to Him, but follows in obedience.

Note but one point more as to Abraham's faith. At first it was apparently a faith in temporal promises. He enjoyed this world, and looked forward for his posterity, that they were to have in it a goodly portion, as God promised them. But had this been all, would not the hopes he entertained have proved at best unsatisfactory? Abraham, we read in the text, gave up the ghost and died. And do you not think that, if all he hoped from God had reference to this life, he must have felt a chill come over his soul as his body wasted, and he learned that, though it was a good thing to hope for the prosperity of his children when he was gone, yet in the senseless grave he could himself be no partaker in their earthly happiness? Doubtless, if Abraham's faith at first rested in temporal promises, it grew clearer and more un-earthly as life wore on. "In thy seed shall the nations of the earth be blessed." Shall we suppose that as the patriarch's eyes grew dim he had no thought of being himself a sharer personally in this blessedness? "I am the God of Abraham," says God to Moses four hundred years after the death recorded in our text. I have not forsaken him, though he has been so long dead. The Article of our Church then is right, that these fathers of old in their best moments did not look only for transitory promises. And doubtless, when Abraham came to die, he knew that, though flesh and blood, and all earthly good things, perish, he was safe with the everlasting arms beneath him, that He who

had sustained him in life was his friend in death also. All earthly good things, promised for ourselves or those we love, Christians who have real faith know are only valuable when they are the type of things heavenly, and when, through God's goodness, they are made the means of securing to us better heavenly blessings. The promised land, with all its blessings of abundance, what was it to a Jew when he came to die, unless through the privileges he received in it he had good hope of entering then into the heavenly Canaan?

In this, as in other matters, the faith of Abraham was, doubtless, like that of true Christians; as life wears on, and they feel themselves gradually loosening from its ties, learning, no longer by rote, but from the deepening experience of a growing acquaintance with their unseen Lord, they come more and more to feel, that not here, but in the land unseen, where Christ dwells, and keeps the souls of the blessed in their true home, is to be found the only reality of all those glimpses of happiness which have cheered them on earth—there only is the land in which they are to look for the true fulfilment of all God's promises, that He will comfort them and keep them evermore. Thus a Christian's faith grows, like Abraham's, more spiritual, as he passes through life's trials. Many other points might be noted, but here we have more than enough to show us that Abraham's faith of old, and the Christian's faith now, are one and the same in essence.

2nd, and lastly, as Abraham was full of faith, so, what is much less frequently noticed, was he full of earnest love. His faith showed itself in love. It was like all real faith, rooted in love to God—its fruit was love to man. *E. g.* Abraham did not go alone from his father's house, but took with him those who

were dear to him. He would not leave them where God was unknown. Not his wife only, but his nephew—he took both. And he seems to have loved his servants also, as Eliezer of Damascus, who was to be his heir. God says of Abraham (xviii. 19), “I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord.” Abraham laboured to cultivate family religion, for he loved his family with true spiritual love. It is ever so with a man of real faith, that his religion shows itself in love, in friendly acts of attention and regard to those brought near to him. He cares for their temporal and their spiritual welfare. We read in the 17th chapter how Abraham took care that all his household should enter into covenant with God: an example for all of us Christians, not to be contented to serve God in Christ in the retirement of our own private room, but each of us to strive to bring his family to Christ; by making them partakers of outward ordinance, as Abraham in the circumcision of his house; by family prayer; by urging the young among them to confirmation; by leading them to the Lord’s Supper, to frequent God’s house, and read His Word, and pray to Him by themselves: and not by thus leading them to reverence ordinances only, but by praying for them, and being very careful that the whole example of our own Christian life shall help them to be real Christians. A true Christian’s religion, like Abraham’s, will show itself in active love.

Nor was it his household only that Abraham thus loved. We are told how earnest he was to deliver Lot out of captivity after he had withdrawn himself from his company. He allowed no remembrance of ungrateful usage to make him forget the claims of blood. He pursued after the kings who had made Lot prisoner, and brought him back with all his goods. So a

man faithful to Christ loves his kindred, forgiving every cause of offence, and thinking only of their need.

Note also, in conclusion, Abraham's zealous love in his earnest pleadings for Sodom. He had no personal interest in the place, but he could not bear that it should perish. He pleaded hard with God to spare it. We have a marked instance here how the faithful servant of God is ever interested in all around him. He cannot bear that the thoughtless, ignorant, or wicked, should perish in their godless course. He prays for them, he strives in every way to help them. If our faith in Christ is real, we shall be stirred to constant exertions for all the thoughtless amongst whom we live. If we in this city follow in the steps of faithful Abraham, we shall feel our hearts stirred if haply by any means we can help to rouse the sleeping, and save those who do not know their danger, who are slumbering in peace while God's judgments gather round them. The inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah, those careless cities of the plain, have too surely their representatives in this great metropolis. If we believe what Christ has told us of the value of their souls, of His earnest longing to save them by His precious blood, we shall be urged to do what we can for them by teaching them, and guiding them, and trying to win them by every means. Partakers of the true love and faith of Abraham—if we are real Christians we shall feel as He felt for those who do not feel for themselves.

XVI.—THE PRECIOUS BLOOD OF CHRIST.

1 PETER i. 18, 19, 20.

“Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers ;

“But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot :

“Who verily was fore-ordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you.”

THE services of this third Sunday in Advent are supposed to invite our attention to the Christian Ministry. There is nothing so characteristic of this ministry as its office to preach Christ, the Lamb of God. John the Baptist began this office, when, pointing to Christ, he said, “Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world.”* And here in the text we have the same image of the lamb : “Ye were redeemed . . . with the precious blood of Christ as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.” The image of the lamb is obviously from Isaiah liii. 7, “He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter:” and so appropriate did the image seem when the whole object of Christ’s mission was distinctly understood on the close of His earthly history, and through the preaching of the Apostles after the day of Pentecost, that “the Lamb” became a recognised name for Christ. We find it so used in the Book of the Revelation more than twenty times.

* John i. 29.

Now, it has been the tendency of some recent discussions in the Church to bring into question the exact relation in which our blessed Redeemer stands to us and to the Father, as having given His life as our ransom to save us from our sins. The phrase ransom occurs Matt. xx. 28—*δοῦναι τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ λύτρον ἀντὶ πολλῶν*. The same words occur Mark x. 45. Also we have — 1 Timothy ii. 6 — *ὁ δὸς ἑαυτὸν ἀντιλυτρον ὑπὲρ πάντων*. In the text we have *ἐλυτρώθητε*. It would not, I think, be wise for persons who are not professional theologians to plunge into such discussions; but when they arise in the Church, it is well for all of us from time to time to refresh ourselves with the calm contemplation of some of those simple views of Gospel truth which stand out everywhere in the Word of God, and everywhere proclaim the death of Christ as that which has rescued man from eternal misery.

Let us here first call to mind some passages in which Christ is thus spoken of as having paid a ransom, or offered a sacrifice, or propitiation, or atonement, to save us from our sins.

1st. Matthew xx. 28, and Mark x. 45, as quoted above—
“The Son of Man came to give his life a ransom for many.”

Then 1 Tim. ii. 5, 6. “There is one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.”

Then Heb. ix. 11, 12. “Christ being come an high priest of good things to come . . . by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us” (*αἰωνίαν λύτρωσιν εὐράμενος*).

1 Cor. v. 7. “Christ our passover is sacrificed for us” (*τὸ πάσχα ἡμῶν ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν ἐτύθη Χριστός*).

Romans iii. 23. “All have sinned and come short of the

glory of God. Being justified freely through his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus (*διὰ τῆς ἀπολυτρώσεως τῆς ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ*). Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation (*προέθετο ἱλαστήριον*) through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness (*εἰς ἔνδειξιν τῆς δικαιοσύνης αὐτοῦ*) for the remission of sins that are past (*διὰ τὴν πάρεσιν τῶν προγεγονότων ἁμαρτημάτων*), through the forbearance of God. To declare, I say, at this time, his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus."

With all these compare the song in honour of the Lamb, Rev. v. 9:—"Thou art worthy . . . for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood (*ὅτι ἐσφάγης καὶ ἡγόρασας τῷ Θεῷ ἡμᾶς ἐν τῷ αἵματί σου ἐκ πάσης φυλῆς*), &c. &c.

Now consider these passages. They are not a few isolated texts; they serve to represent fairly the whole tenor of the New Testament. Compare them with the expression in our text: "Ye were redeemed (*ἐλυτρώθητε*) with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." Do they not seem to set clearly before us why Christ is called the Lamb in the last chapter of the Revelation, as in the first chapter of St. John's Gospel, as being the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world?

The words used in the text, "as of a lamb without blemish and without spot," leave us in no doubt that there is an allusion here to Exod. xii. 5, where it is said of the Paschal Lamb, "Your lamb shall be without blemish." So that here, as in other places, Christ is compared to the Paschal Lamb whose blood was sprinkled on the door-posts, that God, when

He passed through the land of Egypt in vengeance, might spare those families which were marked with the blood of the Covenant.

I apprehend, therefore, few will doubt that, when Christ is called the Lamb of God, it is either the paschal lamb or the lamb of sacrifice, rather than the lamb the emblem of gentleness, that is spoken of. In the passage of Isaiah, indeed, from which the phrase comes, it may seem, when we take by itself the verse in which the phrase occurs, to be rather the lamb, the emblem of gentleness, that is spoken of. "He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before his shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth." But if we take the whole passage connectedly, we shall find that even there the appropriateness of the allusion is much increased by our understanding a reference to the sacrificial lamb. The suffering Redeemer stands before his enemies as gentle as a lamb ready to be sacrificed, and the idea of such sacrifice has already been suggested in the 4th, 5th, and 6th verses of the passage: "Surely he hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." And, again, in v. 8, "For the transgression of my people was he stricken." Here we have plain statements that the great Deliverer, who was to be gentle as a lamb, was also, like the lamb, the sacrifice.

Hence, it is only natural that, when the Apostle Peter in the chapter following our text, v. 24, speaks of Christ as having His own self borne our sins in His own body on the

tree, he should introduce a reference to the same 53rd chapter of Isaiah, quoting the very words of its 5th verse "By whose stripes ye were healed."

Read this of 1 Peter ii. 24: "Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sin, should live unto righteousness; by whose stripes ye were healed."

We have, then, before us an ample collection of the expressions of Scripture on this subject. What is the truth which these expressions set before us? I would not that we should involve ourselves in abstruse speculations as to the exact meaning and bearings of the doctrine of sacrifice, or attempt to account for the exact way in which the one great Sacrifice avails to ransom us from sin and misery. To enter on such matters would, I think, be trying to be wise where God is silent, and many have only got quite beyond their depth when they have plunged in the sea of such mysteries. The hidden things belong to God. The clear understanding of the relationship between the Father and the Eternal Son—of the way in which God's attributes of strict righteousness and pitying mercy are to be reconciled—of the exact mode in which the sufferings of the Son became available for our redemption—the clear understanding, in fact, of the exact manner in which by His stripes we are healed—these seem all to belong to the class of mysterious things which, with our present faculties, we cannot understand: God has not revealed them to us. But here, as elsewhere, in the midst of what is mysterious, He has given us simple truths which are very plain. They are all summed up in the brief expression—"Christ is the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world."

I. But, first, it must be allowed that in the text, carefully considered, there is something peculiar, and some words which, combined with the notions we usually connect with the rest of the phrase, are not exactly what we should have expected. The Apostle speaks in this passage of the precious blood of Christ as of a lamb without blemish and without spot—preordained before the foundation of the world (a phrase, this last, which strongly reminds us of that other in Revel. xiii. 8, where Christ is, according to our version, called the lamb slain from the foundation of the world). Now the Apostle in this passage says that the blood of this precious sacrifice, the offering of which God had preordained from eternity, had redeemed the persons he was addressing; but from what?—Redeemed them from what? We perhaps naturally expect as the answer, From the punishment of sin—from death eternal. But it is not so here: we read, v. 18, “Ye are redeemed with the precious blood of Christ from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers.” They had been slaves in a house of bondage; given up to all the follies and sins of their fathers—sins at once of superstitious, debased religion, and of common worldly living. They were quite enslaved to these things; but the Lord Jesus Christ had laid down His life to purchase for them their liberty. The redemption here directly spoken of, then, is a redemption from the enslaving power of sin, not only from the punishment which sin deserves. Here is an instance in which the prominent idea in the doctrine of our redemption is this, that, through what Christ has done for us, He has raised us to powers of holy living. And this is very important to be noted: We must not forget that the Apostles do thus apply the doctrine of redemption, because

a great deal which they have written on it has another aspect.

Consider this aspect of the redemption wrought for us by Christ. He has redeemed us from the debasing influence of the sins to which we are slaves by nature and descent. "Ye are redeemed by the precious blood of Christ from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers." This has been one great purpose of the death of Christ—through some mysterious connexion which exists between His death and His power of killing sin in our souls, to open up for us the possibility of dying with Him to sin, and living henceforward a holy, heavenly life. This change in us, which is referred to His death as its cause, is elsewhere set forth as crucifying with Him our old evil nature, as St. Paul says in several places, and especially in Gal. ii. 20: "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." There is far more in this than any influence of Christ's blessed example in that upright, holy life of His of which His death was the seal. We cannot study the Apostles' sayings on this subject, and allow their expressions their fair weight, without seeing that there is some mystery here as to the nature of our souls and their connexion with the Eternal Son. It is through some efficacy of His self-imposed sufferings that they have gained the power of being like Him. Call this to mind all who would be reckoned amongst Christ's redeemed. If you are really His, you are redeemed from your past vain conversation—your frivolous lives in which you sought only worldly objects—you are freed from them, and you come

through Him to something far higher than in your unconverted state you could ever have been deemed capable of attaining to. If you have not thus died to sin, do not deceive yourselves; you are not in the number of Christ's people.

The Apostle speaks here of the vain conversation handed down from their fathers. No example, even of those who from age or station are most entitled to our respect, can make that life and conversation becoming for Christians which is in truth vain and worldly. No man can be excused for continuing in such habits of living, speaking, thinking, because he has been brought up in them, and taught so to live, speak, and think, by those who have gone before him. Not what our fathers did, or those who are powerful in the earth now do, nor what the whole mass of society around us does, gives the Christian his rule, but what his own conscience, in the secret communings which it maintains between his soul and God, tells him Christ requires. Gal. v. 24: "They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh, with the affections and lusts." It would be wrong to overlook what the Bible thus points out of a direct connexion between the doctrine of our redemption and our being thus sanctified.

II. But neither are we, secondly, to forget, that in its most common aspect in Scripture the doctrine of Redemption is set forth as telling, not of our sanctification, but of the forgiveness of sin, of our being looked upon as just, though in truth we are miserable sinners, all through God's boundless mercy in Jesus Christ, and all assured to us in some mysterious way through His death. Divines are right to refer to two reconciliations as effected by the sacrifice of the death of Christ. What we have now spoken of first has to do with our being recon-

ciled to God, with the doing away of that feeling of estrangement which keeps the carnal soul away from Him, and with the soul being brought near to Him, so as to begin, through His Spirit's help, a spiritual life of holiness. But there is a great reality also in the other phrase, that through the death of Christ God is reconciled to us. I care not whether the phrase be found in Scripture. It may be true enough that where the phrase reconciliation occurs in Scripture it is used with reference to our being reconciled to God, not God to us, as 2 Cor. v. 19, "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself." But the phrase, God being reconciled to us, may still have been very wisely adopted by divines, as stating shortly and forcibly a truth which, though not in this phrase, is undoubtedly set forth by many phrases all through the Scriptures. The death of Christ gained and secured forgiveness for lost sinners. This is what is meant when we say that it reconciled God to us. We may not try to penetrate the veil and affect to explain the exact mode in which Christ's holy sacrifice had this efficacy. When, in Rev. i. 5, St. John speaks of "Him who loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood;" or when, in his 1st Epist. i. 7, St. John says that "the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin"—such words, understood as showing forth that the death of Christ is the source from which pardon flows to lost sinners, are but the echo of a hundred passages which proclaim the same great truth. Man is saved from endless misery by the death of Christ. Each religious soul amongst us, awakened by the Spirit of God, only knowing his past sins to be the blacker from his growing spiritual perceptions as he advances in the Christian life, feels it in his inmost soul to be his only hope, that Jesus Christ has borne

our sins in his own body on the tree. Something (we know not what) which intervened between the mercy of our heavenly Father and our souls was done away by the death of Christ. We cannot in our imperfect state sufficiently understand the heinous nature of sin, the awful purity of God, and the gulf which sin, once introduced into the world, made between God and sinners, to be able to explain how the death of Christ bridged this gulf over. But this we do understand, that Christ dying for us has put us in a completely new relation to the Father, and has given the soul confidence even when most overwhelmed with a deep sense of its weakness, and with a painful remembrance of its sins past—that God in Jesus Christ is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Christ, we have seen, is, according to our version of Rev. xiii. 8, called the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world; certainly all the hopes of pardon which men conscious of their sin ever entertained in the old days, whatever might be the subjective grounds on which they rested, had all their real objective stability from the great work which the Lord Jesus Christ was destined to accomplish by His death. No doctrine but this will come up to the fulness of the language in which the Word of God speaks of the healing efficacy of the blood of Christ.

And each of us, my friends, if we are to have hope in our deaths—if, when nearing the land of spirits, by God's mercy acting on our consciences, we see our sins in their real heinousness, if we are not to be overwhelmed, but to have good hope—this must be from our deep conviction of that power of the blood of Christ which has removed from us the wrath of God. May we all, through the Holy Spirit, learning better to

understand our sinfulness, become daily more and more alive to the hopelessness of our state without the redemption purchased for us by Christ's blood, and therefore more and more truly grateful for what Christ has borne for us. The Good Shepherd has given His life for the sheep. "Scarcely for a righteous man will one die . . . but God commendeth his love towards us in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more, then, being now justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him." Rom. v. 7, 8, 9.

Let all, both ministers and people, call to mind that the doctrine of the Cross in its fulness, speaking of God's being reconciled to us and our being reconciled to God—of pardon and of new power of holy living—comprehends shortly the whole Gospel. Hence St. Paul might say wisely as a minister of the Gospel (1 Cor. ii. 2), "I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified;" for truly on this doctrine of the Cross, fully unfolded, hang all the soul's hopes of pardon, and of living acceptably with God both here and hereafter.

XVII.—CHRIST'S PRIESTHOOD.

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 HEBREWS v. 9, 10.

“Being made perfect, he (that is, the Lord Jesus Christ) became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him ;

“Called of God an high priest, after the order of Melchisedec.”

AN high priest, after the order of Melchisedec. Christ's priesthood. This is a fit subject for the beginning of Passion Week. His priesthood. It is a peculiar office, and ought to be viewed in its peculiarities. There are priests many: there have been priests from the beginning of history; and there are those who are called priests amongst us now. Educated persons do not need to be told whence this English word priest comes: that it is merely a shortened form of Presbyter; and that when we speak of priests as ministering in the Christian Church amongst ourselves we have, or ought to have, no thought of their being priests in any other sense than as presbyters or elders, trained in the deacon's office, and going on in maturer age to be full teachers and rulers in the congregation of Christ, the appointed guides and counsellors of all who come to them for aid in His name, that they may have their souls directed to Him. But a priest in the full sense of the word is, we know, something more than the English word priest thus derived implies. The priest spoken of in the text and throughout the Epistle to the Hebrews is not a presbyter, but, as the Greek word here used (*ιερεύς*) denotes, a sacrificing priest—a priest who

makes atonement. Look at chapter iii. 1: "Consider the apostle and high priest (not presbyter, but sacrificing priest) of our profession;" and read in connexion with it chapter v. ver. 1: "Every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men (that is, to stand in the place of men) in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sin." v. 4: "No man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron (Aaron was appointed by God to be a sacrificing priest). So also Christ glorified not himself to be made a high priest. . . . but he that said unto him, Thou art a priest (a sacrificing priest) for ever after the order of Melchisedec." v. 7: "In the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death. . . ." v. 9: "Being made perfect, he, (that is, Christ) became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him; called of God an high priest, after the order of Melchisedec." And so all through the chapters which treat of this subject. In reading this Epistle to the Hebrews it is right to note the well-known distinction between the two words and the two offices they denote: the presbyter priest's office and the sacrificing priest's office. In the Christian Church the one is a man's office—a Christian minister's office; the other is reserved for the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

But, before we go further, let me ask, Do we require a priest in the second, the highest, sense at all? Why should we need a priest to make sacrifice and atonement? It may be well, you will say, for ignorant barbarians to think that they must have some holier human being to stand between them and God. It is only natural for savages who worship

demon gods—objects of terrible dread, who, they fear, will consume them if they venture too near—to think that they must have some privileged wonder-worker who may stand between them and the wrath of the unseen power. It might be well enough, you may say, for the rough soldiers or trembling peasantry of the mediæval times, whose life was so very far from bearing any likeness to the ennobled picture of enlightened human nature which the Gospels set before us, crouching down in abject superstition, to rejoice that the supreme and holy Lord was not brought directly near to them, but was to be approached by gradual ascents, through a whole series of mediators, beginning with holy castes of men living, and glorified saints departed, and ending with Christ's virgin mother and Christ Himself; for they would have felt uneasy, nay, terrified, if they had thought they were standing face to face with Almighty God. Nay, you may say it might be well enough even for the chosen people of old, who knew certainly far more of God than any of their contemporaries, but did not know half so much of Him as we do—far advanced in civilization though they must have been before they could have enjoyed the songs of David and the glorious prophecies of Isaiah—still to cherish the thoughts by which their rude ancestors in the desert had been trained to draw near to God through a mediator. At best, it may be said, theirs was but a half civilization and a half religious knowledge, and they might naturally enough still think the intervention of a priest was required to stand between them and the terrible power of Jehovah, and to propitiate Him by some offering. But was not this, it is asked, the relic of their ignorance? And we who are fond of saying that we live in the full blaze of the intellectual and religious light of a far

advanced century of the Christian era, are we not to free ourselves from notions which are Jewish at the best, if not pagan, and rejoice that we can stand face to face with God ; trusting in His mercy and the general acquittal of our own conscience, approaching Him devoutly without mediation and without a sacrifice ?

My friends, I do not know whether any of us here present have ever distinctly shaped this thought into words ; but no doubt many persons amongst us—many of those especially who, as they read and think, come to find themselves indifferent to the old systems of theology in which they were trained in childhood—are moved by some such thoughts, and have, as I believe, their whole religious character greatly marred by them. Now observe, I pray you, a qualification which I was constrained to introduce in the last sentence. I was about to say that some objected they did not need a mediator and a sacrifice, because they could draw near to God direct, trusting in His mercy and the acquittal of their own consciences ; but I was constrained to alter this and say the general acquittal of their consciences. And what is this general acquittal ? There lies the fallacy. A general acquittal such as this leaves, I suspect, several particular counts in the verdict, on which we are found guilty. What does God require of us—a respectable, straightforward, upright, virtuous, tolerably benevolent life ? Certainly He requires all this ; but nothing more ? And even this by the way—is it clear that all who would claim this general acquittal are quite sure that they are innocent, tried even by this standard—upright, virtuous, benevolent ? There is a good deal implied in these three words. Virtuous : are there no secret sins of long ago, which shatter the claims of

many a respectable man to be esteemed virtuous? Benevolent: who will dare to talk of his benevolence, who, living in a great city, with sin and misery in every form rampant around him, lives a quiet easy life, enjoying Heaven's good gifts with very little thought of others' wants, satisfying his charitable obligations by a few round sums on subscription lists, without any deep attention to the pressing calls which want, and sin, and wretchedness are shrieking in his ears—holding, in fact, the urgent petitions thus made to be pretty nearly as much a matter of course as the cries in the streets, which each morning or evening may be heard in his study or dining-room, but to which he has become so accustomed that they never trouble him? Perhaps, even as to upright, many persons who stand very well with the world and themselves are not truly upright—have at times used some sharp practice, as they say, or given in to some common worldly maxim as to the way of getting on in life, and might run a risk of being at once condemned in a strict Christian Court of Conscience. Even as to uprightness, men may have failed who were never suspected of failure by others, and do not suspect themselves. And I fear, my friends, that many a respectable member of society, whose conscience gives a general verdict in his favour on the other two counts, is, when we sift the matter, neither really virtuous nor really benevolent. And this even when we think of man's judgment. What are we, then, when we think of Him who scans the most secret recesses of the heart? So that it is not so clear that, even with the low standard we have spoken of, those who think themselves safe are entitled to an acquittal. Upright, virtuous, benevolent. If any think they may stand unabashed face to face with God because they are such, there

is danger that they are deceiving themselves as to their real state; and let them call to mind, lastly, that it is not what we are at this moment, but what we have been all our lives, that stamps the religious character. Is not God to look at my whole life? and, if He does look at it, who is there who, trying himself by the very lowest standard of common Christian respectability, must not cry out Unclean?

But what trifling, after all, is this! It is not enough to be respected or really respectable, and to have been so all our days. Is there not such a thing as holiness? Is not He whom we wish to approach the all-Holy God? Does He not delight in holiness? We all understand in some degree what is denoted by the word: graces which are not of this world—spiritual apprehensions and spiritual longings—which make us like God, and which can bear up the soul when it enters into the land of pure spirits. If the soul's existence were limited to this earthly life, it might do without holiness. But the soul's home is in a region of holy and blessed spirits, and He with whom we have to do is the Spirit of holiness. What man, then, can be really thoughtful—really looking forward—who is contented with those common good qualities which may pass muster here for the few years of our earthly life, but which in no wise imply the possession of the graces indispensable in the soul's true and eternal home? My friends, lay this much to heart. If we take a true view of our human nature and its prospects, we must, however amiable or respectable, fall down before God overwhelmed for our little progress in holiness. Can any one who is unholy feel confidence in himself while standing face to face with God? And does the enlightenment of our age, or the respectability of our lives, or our general good inten-

tions, or our strict uprightness, or even our deep and active feeling of the claims of our fellow-men upon our sympathies, make us feel that we are holy? All these things are good and indispensable; but we need something far beyond them. Without holiness no man can see God. We must grow in holiness, or we cannot grow in His favour. But if we wait till we are holy before we draw near to Him, we must wait for ever; therefore is it not certain that, sinners as we are, —overwhelmed by a sense of our weakness, if we really know ourselves—coming as sinners to God—we have, in truth, need of a daysman—a mediator to stand between us and Him? we have need of something which shall assure our consciences that, sinful as we are, He will accept us. And this is what is guaranteed in the mediation and sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ, our Priest. All men, the very best of men—the holiest know it the most—all men need, and we rejoice to have found in Christ, a Priest.

It would be folly to enter here on any of those subtle questionings which have at times disturbed the Church as to the exact force and meaning of the word sacrifice. Christ our Priest offering up Himself is set forth in Scripture as bringing God and man together in a sense of nearness which no uprightness or holiness of our own could ever have attained to. And this offering of Christ is symbolised and has its full completion in His willingly endured death upon the cross, whereby in some mysterious sense He offered Himself to God. Read Heb. ix. 11. “Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, neither by the blood of goats and calves (nor by any of the emblematic sacrifices of the Old Covenant), but by his own blood, entered in once into the holy place. For if the blood of bulls and of

goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? And for this cause He is the Mediator of the New Testament." Christ's mediation and Christ's sacrifice both enter into the idea of His priesthood—both are set forth in Scripture as the means of reconciling the guilty soul to God. And all the sacrifices of the old times were but shadows of this great fact, that Christ offering up Himself has set God and man at one. And our conscience tells us, if we deal fairly with ourselves, that we do in truth need some one thus to stand between us and the Almighty. We have no mere human mediators, nor, in the strict sense of the word, any human priests; but we have one great High Priest, who is both God and man, in whom we have access to the Father. This is the simple faith of the Gospel, without subtle questionings, or attempts to penetrate the explanation of mysteries: and the more a soul grows in knowledge of itself and its wants and God's requirements, the more must it understand and rejoice in this simple doctrine that Christ is our priest.

"Of the things which we have spoken," says the 8th chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, "this is the sum: We have such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens." To assert Christ's priesthood is the sum of the reasoning and illustrations of this Epistle, from which so much of our Scripture reading in church is at this time of the year * taken. And the sum of the application of the doctrine which I would now

* April 5th, Palm Sunday.

urge is this,—that in the secret recesses of every thoughtful man's heart—if he be thoughtful not merely for the passing things of time, but as to his undying nature—there is a deeply seated feeling of dissatisfaction on account of sin, which cannot be quieted except in the faithful hearty recognition of Christ's priesthood.

A man who has lived recklessly as to this world knows himself to be a fool. Often while life still lasts he finds that he has quite outlived the vain enjoyments for which he sacrificed so much of the world's more substantial goods. But if he lives reckless of the world to come, he will certainly know himself at last to be something worse than foolish. Trace a worldly man to the end. When death creeps over him, little as he may have thought of his folly before, his last feeling will certainly be, I am indeed a fool. But it is something more than folly that he has been guilty of—for far worse than folly is sin. If he has not known before what the feeling of sin is, he will become painfully conscious of it after death, when it is too late for him to be brought near to God. But unless he is utterly reckless, there is while he lives—when he gives himself time to think—a feeling of dissatisfaction within every thoughtful breast because of sin. Let the voice, I beseech you, of God the Holy Ghost speaking through the conscience be heard when it tells us we are sinners. Be very cautious how we refuse to listen to its low whisperings. Have you not this feeling of sin? Have you not this yearning after something higher and holier than the unsatisfying pursuits of this world? Do you not hear within you these whisperings of God's voice which call you to Him, even by that which seems to keep you from Him—your sense of sin? The Lord Jesus Christ is at hand, whose blood cleanseth from all sin—

who, bringing you near to the Father, will lead you on to holiness, if your sense of sin makes you long to be freed from it and made holy.

My friends, all Christendom will this week follow the history of those events which ushered in the consummation of the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. If the history of these events is to be anything more to us than a mere scenic representation of the Lord's sufferings—if it is to do more than please the ear and fancy—the events of Passion-week must be for us a reality, not only a historical reality, by our not doubting the full truth of the events recorded, but a reality for our hearts, by our being possessed with those great doctrines which the outward events of the Lord's Passion set before us in a lively image. We are sinners: we need to be brought to God; we need to be cleansed, and to have a ready access opened up to Him. All this is offered in the Lord Jesus Christ, who, as He died making sacrifice of Himself, in some mysterious way became the great High Priest of our fallen human nature, ready to make reconciliation between God and our alienated race—between God and the alienated souls of you and of me. We cannot go through Passion-week aright without a deep feeling of all that is implied in Christ being our priest.

And now as to Melchisedec, of whom we read so much in this place of Scripture: Jesus, we are told, was made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec; and in the text "called of God an high priest after the order of Melchisedec." What does this mean? It is, you will remember, from the 110th Psalm that the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews derives this figure, "after the order of Melchisedec." The Psalmist, speaking of the Messiah, says, v. 4, "The Lord hath sworn,

and will not repent: thou art a Priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec." This 110th Psalm sets forth the Messiah as a King ruling over his enemies, judging among the heathen; and thus He is well likened to the Priest-King of the book of Genesis. Now the appropriateness of the image will be plain if we look at the passage of the history in which Melchisedec is mentioned, Gen. xiv. 18, 20. The whole is contained in three verses. Abraham was coming back from that slaughter of the kings, by which he had rescued Lot from captivity. As the patriarch passed in triumph, "Melchisedec king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God. And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth: and blessed be the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand. And he (Abraham) gave him tithes of all." "Now consider," says the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, "how great this man was unto whom even the patriarch Abraham gave the tenth of the spoils."

The Jews were naturally struck by this recognition on the part of their great ancestor of a priesthood earlier than that which God instituted in the days of Moses: they were amazed that he who was the father of the faithful, and whom they pictured as the one great worshipper of Jehovah in his day, in the midst of a world sunk in ignorance, should have bowed down to receive a blessing from this Canaanitish king, and have offered him tithes; and that this king should be recognised as the priest of the most high God. And doubtless it is a most remarkable circumstance in the old history. The Jews could not explain it: in their attempts to account for the circumstance, some said that Melchisedec

was Shem, the pious son of Noah, whose life was protracted to a great old age ; others, that he was a being from the spiritual world—an angel, or the Son Himself. And these groundless conjectures have been taken up by Christians. What was he then ? He was without doubt one of those worshippers of the true God who lingered here and there in the world, and kept up the tradition of the true religion when ignorance and sin were gathering fast around them. Such an one probably was the patient Job in after times, worshipping God, and teaching God's truth to all ages, though not himself one of the peculiar covenant people. Such an one might Balaam have been had he proved a faithful instead of a false prophet. Melchisedec was a king, and, as a king believing in the Lord, he ministered to his people in their religious as well as civil capacity, ere yet the kingly and priestly offices had been disconnected. Abraham's heart recognised him at once as a priest and king, and rejoiced to honour him. It is always a cause of rejoicing for a faithful soul when it finds and honours others like-minded with itself in a world which thinks little of God.

The after-history recognises no such royal priests among these Canaanitish nations, which were fast sinking deep in wickedness. Abraham honoured Melchisedec ; and Melchisedec's name naturally came to be much thought of, as the representative of a royal priesthood more ancient in its origin, and greater and more honourable, than that of Aaron, since he was a king as well as priest. Then, some thousand years after Abraham's time, the Psalmist reverted to the name, and could use it most appropriately as a type of the priesthood to which the King Messiah was to be called,

which in its antiquity stretched back far before Abraham's day, even to the Creation or to eternity, before which the whole Jewish priesthood was to fade away—God sware, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever—a priest not like Aaron, but a king and priest—after the order of Melchisedec.

And so the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews runs through all the circumstances—plays as it were upon the name: King of Righteousness, King of Peace. How well is this name fitted to represent the priesthood of Christ! Holding a personal office of his own—not derived from father, or mother, or genealogy—whose birth is not mentioned, nor yet his death—how well does this name typify the Son of God, who abideth a priest continually! In these verses the sacred writer is trying to illustrate the appropriateness of the Psalmist's image, that Christ is a priest after the order of Melchisedec. The title then is well suited to set before us the nature of Christ's priesthood. As it is far older than any regularly established human priesthood, so it is far more lasting—it is that before which all human priesthoods bow—it is not a priesthood of one people only, like the Jewish priesthood, for Melchisedec was a priest beyond the limits of the favoured race. Does not this clearly set before us that the Lord Jesus Christ is a priest, a mediator, a sacrifice, and intercessor for the whole human race? These are points set before us by the figure. Christ's is a priesthood of unlimited antiquity—not bound by human rules of genealogy and descent; it is a priesthood unlimited also in the multitude of those for whom it is available. The Collect for Good Friday sets this well before us, in which we pray that the great sacrifice may

be made available for all Jews, Turks, infidels, and heretics, and that they may be brought near to God in Christ's fold.

Truly the full contemplation of the priesthood of the Lord Jesus Christ leads us to look on all men as our brethren in Him. And while we feel our own sin, and humbly rejoice that He has died to save us from it, we learn to long for the salvation of all around us who are still far away from Him.

XVIII.—APOSTOLIC PREACHING.

1 COR. ii. 2.

“ I determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.”

THIS sums up Apostolic preaching: not only Jesus Christ, but Jesus Christ and Him crucified. There are many other aspects in which Christ may be exhibited, besides that of the crucified, but it is through His cross that He is the Redeemer. The cross of Christ, the precious blood of Christ, the broken body of Christ, the sacrifice of Christ: take away the ideas represented by these phrases, and the doctrine of the Apostles is abolished. To select a passage almost at random, read 1 Peter iii. 18: St. Peter is but echoing the words of all Apostolic doctrine, when he sets forth that Christ suffered “for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God.” It is the doctrine of Christ’s sacrifice which he there sets forth, in no way indeed divorcing it from other parts of Christian teaching, but assigning to it the proper central place. Look at the passage carefully, and it will be found to illustrate all the teaching of the Apostles.

Read 1 Peter iii. 14: “If ye suffer for righteousness’ sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled; but sanctify the Lord God in your hearts.” . . . v. 17: “It is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing than for evil doing.” The Apostle is here urging the practical duty of a consistent life of Christian endurance,

and enforcing this lesson by the sufferings of Christ upon the cross taken as an example. But observe, he does not thus mention these sufferings without reverting also to that in them, to omit which would be a lowering of Christ's majesty, viz., that He suffered not as an example only, but as a sacrifice. St. Peter, even when naturally led to speak of Christ suffering as an example, is not contented with saying "For Christ also hath suffered," but "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God;" and then he passes on to the connexion of Christ's death with His rising again, whereby He secured spiritual life for His people through those gifts of the Holy Ghost which He sends down from His throne on high. In fact, this passage of St. Peter, if carefully examined, will, I think, well exhibit how, in every practical application by the Apostles of the Lord Jesus Christ's example, in every joyful announcement they make of the spiritual privileges He has won for His people through His resurrection, and the place assigned to Him now in heaven as the ruler of the Church and of all creation, there is still present to their minds a deep conviction of the central truth that He died also as a sacrifice. "Christ once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God." Expunge from the Apostolic writings the fact represented by these words in that simple meaning which we have been in the habit of assigning to them from our childhood, and I cannot but think the Epistles become an unmeaning rhapsody. The cross of Christ then, the precious blood of Christ as of an unblemished lamb, the broken body of Christ,—whatever else these phrases point to, they have their deepest, fullest, richest meaning for suffering human souls

bowed down by sin, when they typify that Christ once died for sins—for our sins—the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God.

Christianity is the religion of the cross. The cross gives to it its emblem and its name. Now the cross of Christ of course speaks of many things besides His sacrifice. It speaks, *e. g.*, of the testimony borne by Him to His conviction of the truth of what He taught, and it was the end of that good confession which He witnessed before Pontius Pilate, sealing,—as many martyrs have done since, strong in His imparted strength, and some before His day—nay, some even quite apart from Him and His Church—sealing the record of His sincerity in His blood. Again, the cross of Christ speaks also of that continual warfare which ever has been waged, and will, I suppose, ever be waged while the world lasts, by the sinful crowd against all who rebuke and offend them by the sight or teaching of a holiness that makes them blush. Even the heathen, we know, felt that it was dangerous thus to rise above the low standard of public opinion, and that the truly good man was not unlikely to meet death as his reward. The cross was the natural climax of Christ's opposition to a sinful world. Again, the cross of Christ speaks also to all His people of the readiness they must feel, if it be His will, not to be spared where He suffered. If we are called to a hard life, with many trials, inward and outward, it is well from the thought of the cross of Christ to have this truth forced upon us as life advances, *viz.*, that however gaily we may have begun it, however prosperously we may seem to have floated on over many a league of our life's voyage, still we must be prepared for storms and dangerous quicksands; followers of the suffering Lord Jesus, we must be prepared to find life

a rough passage. Once again the cross of Christ, as the emblem of His death, exhibits Him as perfectly united with our dying humanity. The guide and teacher of redeemed man is no mere emanation from an aërial sphere, such as we can scarcely understand to have any sympathy with our weakness, but the suffering and dying man Christ Jesus, one like to ourselves—how like and yet how different.

Of these then and many other truths, it is granted, the cross of Christ speaks to us. But we may run through many truths, and yet not touch the central truth of all. Take again at random another text, one from St. Paul, Ephes. ii. 13: of the Gentiles he says, “Ye, who sometimes were afar off, are made nigh by the blood of Christ.” Of both Jews and Gentiles he says, that they are reconciled to each other, being reconciled unto God in one body by the cross. Such language is surely not a figure, but unmeaning, if it does not bear testimony to what we have learned from our childhood, viz., that the death of Christ upon the cross brought men near to God through a reconciling sacrifice of atonement.

But now, my friends, let us consider that which is after all the only important point for us, not how we may master and repeat the language in which the Scriptures thus speak of Christ’s death, nor even how we may strive after the most vivid notions that can be attained of the deep mysterious truths which that language typifies, but how, as God caused the Apostles to speak and write that they might set forth plain truths for plain men’s hearts, we may grasp and live upon that practical view of the efficacy of Christ’s death which is indispensable for our spiritual life here, and for giving us good hopes hereafter when our earthly life fails

us. We wish to have a deep practical conviction that for us, for ourselves taken one by one, Christ's cross is the deliverance from sin.

When we speak of Christ's cross as the deliverance from the power of sin, we mean, I think, three things. It delivers the redeemed soul from its feeling of the burden of sin, from its fear of the punishment of sin, and from living in sin.

1. From the burden of sin. My friends, what are our feelings as to sin being a burden? Let the young man stand forth who is taking his fill of worldly pleasure, who, mixing with the society of his co-equals, learns,* away from the restraints of home, unchecked by a mother's or a sister's presence, to allow a licence to his tongue, which, giving to his latent evil desires the embodiment of speech, makes them both stronger within himself, and an excitement to the appetites of others. Let him tell us how these evil desires grow, till from speech they vent themselves in act—and he who a few months or weeks since came from his home a pure youth, goes back soiled and stained to pollute with his presence the chaste beings gathered round his father's hearth, whom, in spite of the hardening effects of his secret degradation, he feels that he still dearly and purely loves. Now there have been pauses in this prodigal's course, even while he has been running his wild brief career unchecked. The stillness and solemn sounds of the place of daily worship, have they not at times spoken to his soul, even when he has most allowed himself thoughtlessly to look on them as only parts of the daily-recurring routine of an unmeaning discipline? Surely God the Holy Ghost has at times thus spoken amid the solemn stillness of God's house to many a reckless soul.

* Preached in Oxford.

Or the serious looks, and obviously growing estrangement, of religious friends, whose estrangement is a silent rebuke to him—or the annoyance of those increasing difficulties which most providentially seem in this place to have a continual tendency to wind themselves round the reckless sinner, and entangle his feet in meshes of his own weaving, from which he soon begins to fear, through what he feels himself and observes of the fate of others, he will never all through his life be able to escape—is not the feeling of this growing annoyance often used by God the Holy Ghost to make him despise and loathe himself, and yearn to be free? Or, while he is learning thus to think of himself, does a letter come from home?—a letter which breathes nothing but the confiding tenderness of those who believe that he is making the best use of his time—repaying by diligence and hopes of future well-earned progress the many sacrifices by which perchance loving hearts have denied themselves that they might do him good—a letter showing that its writer believes him to be growing in favour with God and man, while in very truth he is falling utterly away from God, and all good men are learning to look cold upon him. And does the gush of bitter recollections as to what he might have been, and what he is fast becoming—the contrast between what confiding friends believe him to be, and what he knows he is—overwhelm him, it may be only for a few moments—make him despise himself as a vile, ungrateful hypocrite? Think not lightly of these moments; they are the messengers of God who loves his soul, who yearns to save him from surely and swiftly-coming ruin. God strives in mercy, through these and such-like instrumentalities, to make the reckless sinner feel that sin is indeed a burden. Happy if he listens to God's voice—if he is saved

from drowning his consciousness of the weight of sin by stupifying draughts—if the sense of the weight of the burden grows stronger and more unbearable day by day—till it makes him cry out in real anguish to Him who alone can free him. It will not be denied, I think, even by the reckless who are growing hardened, that sin is in truth, and is in their better moments felt to be, a real heavy burden. For this burden there is no release except through Christ's sacrifice.

Or think not of the reckless, but the well-disposed, respectable, and respected—those who spend their days here, not in dissipated, but well-regulated society—those who endeavour to fulfil fairly the duties of their life and station—the amiable, the industrious, of whom all men speak well. What does it avail that men speak well of you?—the real question is, what God thinks of you, who reads your hearts. How is it with those of your actions which elude every human eye? Is there nothing of which you are deeply ashamed when you reflect that a day is coming when what has taken place in the secret chamber shall be proclaimed upon the house-tops? Is there nothing in your conduct, known to your own secret conscience and God, in which you would be ashamed to make your nearest human friend your confidant? And when you say your prayers at night, or lie wakeful on your bed, or join in the Church's Confession, do you not feel ashamed that you should be enslaved by these secret sins? My friends, if you have any tenderness of conscience—if you have any real understanding of the degradation which sin brings upon a soul formed after the image of God—if perchance any desire has been awakened in you by the Holy Ghost of living like the good and holy men of whom you have read, with one or two of whom you may

have been privileged to hold intercourse, visiting you as good angels—if you have any desire, I say, of being conformed to the image of the Lord Jesus Christ, you must feel what a weight your secret sins are—you must deplore your weakness, which is ever falling, even when your resolution is most fixed to stand. The burden of sin would certainly overwhelm you were it not for the sacrifice of the death of Christ.

Let us suppose a man whose character is very unformed—neither a very good nor a very bad man, rather a good man on the whole—passing quietly through life without any severe struggles as to religious conviction. If this man is to have any hopes of a spiritual life with God and Christ at last—if he has not fallen hopelessly under the dominion of the low seen and felt things around him—if, in the depths of his consciousness, God the Holy Spirit has preserved any place where better religious feelings, though they may not have germinated much as yet, have at least begun to grow—do you not suppose that at times, when he reflects quietly what he ought to be as endowed with an immortal soul, as fast approaching to the end of all his mortal life, and what he really is as yet from his miserable weakness—do you not suppose he must feel the burden that hangs about him, and be glad to confess that he is weighed down by it, while he knows, as he joins in the Church's prayers, that they are no vain simulated words which he is taught to use, when he declares that he has erred and strayed from God's ways, and has no health in him? Truly it is the very first condition of our having any hope in Christ for immortality that we should feel the burden of our sins. All of us—reckless sinners—respectable formalists—good, amiable, conscientious men—we can have no hope unless our sins are a burden to

us—we want the very first feeling which brings us to God in Christ. And the true, earnest, advanced, experienced Christian—what feeling is fixed deeper in his heart than that he is indeed a miserable sinner—that the burden of sin would be unbearable if he did not know where to lay it? A fine conscientiousness—a tender sorrow for sins which rough worldly men would laugh at—a gnawing pain felt at times within our hearts when we think of past days, which those who do not look below the surface would deem to have been all purity and upright conduct—these are marks of Christ's people—marks to be found in their degree in the most innocent Christian children and in all advanced Christian men. The spring of such feelings is never quenched in hearts where the Holy Spirit works. What wonder, then, since real Christians all know the burden of their sin, that they should hold it to be of the very essence of the Gospel to be assured that at the foot of the Cross they may lay their sins' burden? Christ died for sins, the just for the unjust: on Him I lay my burden. Feeling my sins, I know that in this sense the doctrine of the Atonement cannot be denied, without robbing me of all my hope, and making me indeed most miserable—the more miserable the more my conscience is stirred by God the Holy Ghost to feel my sin a burden. The Cross of Christ is the only safe deliverer from the burden of sin for all of us.

2. And the punishment of sin. I do not think that, as a general rule, men are troubled much, while life and health last, with anticipations of the punishment of sin, till, through the feeling of its burden, they are led to God in Christ, and then, as they realise the Saviour's mercy, they lose their fears of punishment—though the deep conviction that

punishment is their due never passes from their thoughts. No doubt there have been many cases in which fear has been the instrument for doing God's work—in which the Holy Spirit of God has startled slumbering consciences at once by the thought of coming punishment—a dream picturing, in unexpected and inexplicable vividness, the terrors of the day of vengeance—a hairbreadth escape which has seemed to snatch the sinner from the grasp of death, as by a miracle, and make him feel, while he is restored to life, how near he was brought to death eternal—a powerful appeal to the conscience from the witnessed misery of another sinner's fate—all these things have been instruments used, by God's Spirit, at times in hearts which never thought of their sin before, to rouse them, through a certain fearful looking for of judgment. Happy those for whom this thought of sin's terrible punishment does not come too late when life is fading, but comes in time to make them feel and know the necessity for repentance. My friends, God has mercifully spared your lives and mine hitherto; but soon we shall have reached that last emergency of our earthly being when we shall be looking, away from the world and all its interests, straight into the unknown darkness beyond death. Certainly, when we come to that hour—if not while friends are still around us to soothe and cheer our racked bodies and agitated spirits—soon after, when we have reached a point in that dread passage to which earthly friends cannot follow us—we must be filled with anticipations either of a happy rest with God in Christ, or an awful punishment for sins unrepented of and unexpiated. The faithful Christian, trusting in the sacrificial power of the Lord Jesus Christ's blood, fears no punishment: overwhelmed by the consciousness of sin, he

has felt that Christ bears it, and, when death comes, he is freed from any fear except that of our common humanity shrinking from the cold touch of dissolution. He knows that the sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law; but God, through Christ's blood, has saved him, and therefore, without fear in the act of dying, he renders thanks to God, who giveth him the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ. I know nothing else but the thought of the sacrifice of the death of Christ which can effectually secure the sinner from the fear of punishment.

3. But, lastly, the precious blood of Jesus Christ is powerful to save from sin itself, as well as from its fears and burdens. It is a calumny to represent that doctrine which tells of free pardon through the unmerited goodness of our Redeemer, as if, because it repudiates human works as having no part in contributing to our salvation, it therefore taught men that they might live without anxious thought and anxious efforts how best to be conformed to the likeness of God, as set forth in the living law of the precepts and example of the Lord Jesus and his Apostles. This is an old calumny, as old as St. Paul's day. But it has its answer in the feeling of the believer's heart, and the evidence of his life. Who make such efforts to follow the Lord Jesus Christ as those who are penetrated with a sense of His great goodness in dying for them? Read Rom. vi. 1, 2: "Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?"

Truly the experience of God's most chosen servants, of all ages, proves that nothing does so quicken their efforts after a life of holiness, as that vivid appreciation of the Father's love, which is wrought in the heart through our

understanding that He has saved us in His Son. The feeling that we are the redeemed children of God, through Christ, with the burden of our sins taken from us, and have no cause to dread its punishment, does fill the soul with fresh energy to serve Him who has redeemed us. All the aspects and characters in which the Lord Jesus Christ is revealed to us are, indeed, intended by the Father to have their part in bringing the souls which contemplate Christ to a growth in holiness. The life of the Lord Jesus Christ, written in the Gospels, winning us, by the gentle influence of His persuasive example, to attempt in youth and manhood, in sorrow and in quiet joy, in solitude and in society, to walk as He walked—the touching spirit-stirring power of His divine addresses, quickened in their access to the conscience by the thought that He who once spake them on earth is living now to give them spiritual force, addressing us by a still small voice from heaven—the thought of Christ at the Father's right hand, ever ready to intercede for us and offer up our prayers—the anticipation of His coming again, so that our eyes at last shall see Him—Christ, I say, revealed in all these aspects, is powerful to stir souls to holiness. But still it is as the dying Redeemer that His power to awaken the soul's deepest feelings, and rouse its highest energies, has been ever most manifested.

Certainly it is no set of Christian precepts—that is, no Christian law—nor any system of Christian philosophy, explaining dogmatically, more fully than they were known before, the relations of the human soul to God—it is not Christ as the Prophet and Teacher only, nor Christ as the Judge, that stirs redeemed souls with resistless power to a Christian life. Nay, even that blessed belief in the

personal nearness and friendship of the Lord Jesus, which is so powerful to comfort and sustain the soul, would not suffice of itself. Christ is proved the friend indeed, and very near, because He died for His brethren. When He shows Himself in His glory to the beloved John, the remembrance of His death is prominently brought forward to give force to the comfort which flows from the thought that He is living. . It is not only (Rev. i. 18) "I am he that liveth, and behold I am alive [your friend] for evermore," but "Fear not, I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore." All thoughts which, bringing Christ before us and very near to us, would raise us to a new life in following Him, do indeed derive their tenderest and most persuasive force from the thought that He died, the just for the unjust, to bring us to God.



